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# ***Abu al-Layth al-Libi***

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**Jihadi Bios Project**

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# Abu al-Layth al-Libi

By K vin Jackson

*The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Combating Terrorism Center, the US Military Academy, the Department of Defense or the US government.*

## Introduction

In the tradition of post-9/11 senior Arab militant figures operating in Khurasan (the Afghanistan-Pakistan region), there is little doubt as to the standing of Libyan jihadi commander Abu al-Layth al-Libi. If Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri came to be the most prominent Arab-Afghan leaders in the wake of the so-called “War on Terror,” these two were largely absent from the field command in Afghanistan and Pakistan, instead confining their role to strategic guidance by defining the parameters of the global jihad. When it came to leading combat on the front lines, it was al-Libi, a longtime leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), who rapidly established himself as the champion of the Arab-Afghan milieu after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Just like the Saudi jihadi commander Khattab (Samir al-Suwaylim) in Chechnya, al-Libi became the public face of the Arab field command in Afghanistan, personally training and directing his fighters on the battlefield. Coupled with his pioneering role in publicizing the activities of the insurgency, his strong dedication and involvement in the day-to-day armed jihad in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region earned him popularity and respect in jihadi circles. Thus, his name still largely dominates the jihadi literature covering key Arab commanders who fought and died in Khurasan. Al-Libi’s stardom is even more remarkable given that he did not submit to the authority of al-Qa`ida, the dominant organization in the Arab-Afghan landscape, until the last year of his life. Before that, he commanded his own fighting force and functioned as an essential magnet for jihadi volunteers; indeed, as many Arab volunteers arriving in Khurasan discovered, all roads lead to al-Libi.

This paper draws together the details of al-Libi's rich career, from his early years in militancy in Afghanistan in the late 1980s to his leading duties in the post-9/11 insurgency against Coalition forces and their regional partners. It also situates the slain Libyan commander in the broader spectrum of Arab-Afghan and militant foreigners, outlining the nature of his relationships with a variety of jihadi groups and figures. This profile is mostly based on primary sources, including accounts of jihadis who personally interacted with al-Libi, as well as on materials that contextualize the different stages of his life.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the value of these sources, the limitations of this research must be acknowledged. The reader has to take into account that owing to the lack of detailed sources on al-Libi, part of his trajectory is at best murky and remains to be satisfactorily addressed. Also, it is important to remind the reader of the possible biases, approximations or inaccuracies conveyed by the sources. Whenever possible, the information contained in this paper have been cross-checked for corroboration.

## **From Libya to Afghanistan**

Abu al-Layth al-Libi (also known as Abu al-Layth al-Qasimi and `Abd al-`Adhim al-Muhajir) was born as `Ali `Ammar al-Ruqay'i in approximately 1972 in Abu Salim, a southern district of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, where he spent his childhood and

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<sup>1</sup> I must here state my gratitude to an Arabic professor of mine and to Mr. Orange for their assistance during my research. My appreciation must also be extended to Nelly Lahoud and to two other reviewers for their valuable comments and critical feedback. I am also grateful to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point for having given me the chance to contribute to this fascinating project.

adolescence.<sup>2</sup> At a relatively young age, he appears to have become increasingly devout and began to immerse himself in religious knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Additional information about this period of his life is scarce, as primary sources reviewed for this research focus on al-Libi's militant path.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1980s, the young al-Libi grew enthusiastic about waging jihad against the Soviets as a result of the appeal of the lectures of the Palestinian scholar `Abdullah `Azzam, who played a major part in the mobilization of a whole generation of would-be mujahidin.<sup>5</sup> Around 1989 or 1990, al-Libi left his home country and headed to Khurasan, where he joined the exiled Arab jihadi community, at a time when the number of foreign volunteers in Peshawar was steadily increasing.<sup>6</sup> In the Peshawar milieu, `Ali `Ammar al-Ruqay`i adopted his nom de guerre, Abu al-Layth al-Libi, which literally translates as "the Libyan Father of the Lion."<sup>7</sup> Military preparation (*i`dad*) being a mandatory step in the jihadi doctrine, al-Libi enrolled himself in the recently erected and highly popular al-Faruq

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<sup>2</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III' Eulogizing Abu-al-Layth al-Libi," Global Terrorism Research Project, 10 February 2009, <http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/4703/ASM20090208.pdf?sequence=4>. Al-Libi's date of birth is provided by one of his closest associates as 1392 (Hijri calendar), corresponding to February 1972 to February 1973. Secondary sources claim that he was born circa 1967. For example, see "Top al-Qaeda Commander 'Killed,'" BBC News, 1 February 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7220823.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7220823.stm).

<sup>3</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>4</sup> One source named "abohazzaa" claims that Abu al-Layth al-Libi used to work as a teacher in Libya. However, the same source says that he left his home country in 1993, which does not match more reliable accounts. See <https://twitter.com/abohazzaa/status/213640164138946560> (accessed 12 May 2014).

<sup>5</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. The date provided in the video is 1410, corresponding to August 1989 to July 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Evoking al-Libi's *kunya* (alias), one of his companion comments that "his choice was good as he embodied many of the characteristics of this surname: intrepidity and bravery, generosity and openhandedness, and nobility and gallantry. As the saying goes: 'Everyone has some traits that are embodied by his name.'"

camp, located in the Zhawara Valley of Khost Province in southeastern Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Established by Usama bin Ladin and his Egyptian-dominated entourage, al-Faruq was one of the three main training facilities run by al-Qa`ida, the others being the al-Siddiq and Jihad Wal camps, based in the same area. Although the author was unable to come across sources detailing al-Libi's sojourn at al-Faruq, it is easily imaginable to establish what kind of courses he went through based on the accounts of other alumni from al-Faruq who were also trained in the early 1990s. The two-month-long training at al-Faruq offered new recruits disciplined physical exercises to harden their endurance; theoretical and practical lessons on a variety of weapons (pistols, machine guns, antitank weaponry, antiaircraft missiles) and explosives, first aid, topography; and lectures by jihadi preachers.<sup>9</sup>

Given that al-Libi was originally groomed in the most notorious camp of al-Qa`ida, one may be tempted to assume that he began his jihadi career as an official member of the Bin Ladin-led organization. However, the fact that he graduated from al-Faruq does not necessarily mean that his loyalty was formally owed to al-Qa`ida. In contrast with nationally oriented Arab militant groups, al-Qa`ida distinguished itself as an inclusive organization that trained a wide array of volunteers in its camps.<sup>10</sup> Many of these did not become sworn members of the organization and were merely trained before leaving

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun*, volume 1, pp. 64–71. Similarly, Muhammad `Awda, a member of al-Qa`ida involved in the 1998 East Africa bombings, also states that his training at al-Faruq lasted for two months and notably consisted of courses on small arms, machine guns, antiaircraft guns, explosives, grenades and topography. See “Embassy Bombing Documents Offer Window into al Qaeda Operations,” *Intelwire*, 15 January 2011, <http://news.intelwire.com/2011/01/embassy-bombing-documents-offer-window.html>.

<sup>10</sup> For more insights into the inclusiveness of al-Qa`ida, see Nelly Lahoud, *Beware of the Imitators: Al-Qa`ida through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary*, (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, June 2012).

without any form of commitment. This explains why the number of al-Qa`ida's trainees has always been much higher than the number of its core members. In the absence of any source pointing out a *bay`a* (oath) to the amir of al-Qa`ida, it is impossible to prove that al-Libi started his jihadi trajectory as a member of the organization.<sup>11</sup> Apart from his time at al-Faruq, the robustness of al-Libi's ties with al-Qa`ida are unclear.

In any case, once he completed his training, al-Libi began putting his recently learned warfare skills into practice by joining his fellow Arab mujahidin on the front lines. He got his first taste of armed jihad during the siege of the city of Khost in southeastern Afghanistan, most likely in 1990.<sup>12</sup> During this period, major engagements for the conquest of the city occurred under the leadership of the legendary Afghan commander Jalaluddin Haqqani. The Battle of Khost holds a particularly prestigious status in the Arab-Afghan literature, as significant number of Arab fighters participated, with some of the most senior ones leading the fight, like the Jordanian Abu al-Harith al-Urduni and the Egyptian Abu al-Walid al-Misri, under the overall command of Haqqani.<sup>13</sup> As al-Misri once put it, "The Arabs were the stars of that conquest."<sup>14</sup> Given his junior status, al-Libi is likely to have fought as a regular fighter under the command of his Arab elders. He participated in the efforts to rout out the forces of the government of Muhammad Najibullah until the end of combat, which resulted in the victory of the mujahidin on 31 March 1991 and marked a

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<sup>11</sup> As explained later in this paper, al-Libi eventually joined al-Qa`ida in 2007.

<sup>12</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>13</sup> See Don Rassler and Vahid Brown, *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa`ida*, (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, July 2011), 29. For a firsthand account on the Battle of Khost, see AFGP-2002-600090. For the original Arabic manuscript, see Abu al-Walid al-Misri's website at [www.mustafahamed.com/?page\\_id=2](http://www.mustafahamed.com/?page_id=2) (accessed 6 September 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 39.



major step toward the end of the Afghan communist's rule. The additional fronts in which al-Libi was engaged remain unknown to the author.

## Rallying the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

The early 1990s marked a shift in Abu al-Layth al-Libi's rationale with his enrolment in the LIFG.<sup>15</sup> Although he had arrived in Afghanistan to fight a classical jihad against an external aggressor, his joining the LIFG indicates that al-Libi's activism would then incline toward that of socio-revolutionaries who, as Thomas Hegghammer contends, "fight for a state power against a Muslim regime perceived as illegitimate."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the LIFG was a Salafi jihadi organization that managed to tie together disparate militant factions under a common umbrella and that coalesced in Pakistan with the aim of overthrowing Mu`ammar al-Qadhafi's rule through armed action.<sup>17</sup> As noted by an eulogy provided by al-Qa`ida, once al-Libi joined this newly founded group, he was rapidly chosen to be integrated in its legal committee (*al-lajna al-shar`iyya*).<sup>18</sup> This promotion can be explained by the fact that, besides having been battle-hardened on the Afghan front lines, al-Libi was also keen to acquire religious knowledge (*`ilm*). He came to study under scholars teaching in the region and apparently "showed brilliance in this regard through his perfect memorization, clever understanding, persistence, and patience," making him a valuable

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<sup>15</sup> As Omar Ashour astutely remarks, "The Fighting Group does not refer to itself as 'Libyan' in any of its publications." See Omar Ashour, "Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformation of Armed Islamist Movement," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 3 (2011): 392. Instead, the group uses the name "Islamic Fighting Group" (*Jama`a al-Muqatila al-Islamiyya*). For the sake of simplification, this paper uses the most well-known acronym, "LIFG."

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979–2006: The Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism," (PhD thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, 2007), 72.

<sup>17</sup> For more details about the LIFG's complex origins and its early activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, see Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of al-Qa`ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi Books, 2010), 49–54.

<sup>18</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

asset for the position.<sup>19</sup> Headed by Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi, the legal committee was designed for devising the lawful framework for disciplining the LIFG's ranks. To do so, the organ set up departments dedicated to study and research, the publication of legal opinions (fatawa) and guidance and counseling.<sup>20</sup> After this assignment, al-Libi retook his military preparation, this time under the shade of the LIFG at its Salman al-Farisi camp, located in Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup>

In the face of the Afghan civil war in 1992, Abu al-Layth al-Libi and the senior leadership of the LIFG refused to be drawn into the internecine conflict and thus decided to relocate to Sudan in 1993. From there, al-Libi participated in the efforts of the LIFG to "[create] the right condition . . . to kindle the firebrand of jihad and to fight the regime of apostasy in Libya," according to his friend Abu Yahya al-Libi.<sup>22</sup> At that time, the group focused on quietly building cells across Libya, collecting weapons and recruiting new members to pave the way for the confrontation with the regime.<sup>23</sup> Abu al-Layth al-Libi was deputized by his superiors to be sent to his home country, along with a group of other LIFG representatives, in order to prepare the necessary arrangements for a full-scale war against al-Qadhafi. His new mission almost immediately failed, as he was arrested by a Libyan police patrol while crossing the border. Detained at a station in the arid area of Misa`id, al-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi, "Hiwar al-Shaykh Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi ma' Majallat 'Bayariq al-Majd'," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, [www.tawhed.ws/r?i=7u720c36](http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=7u720c36) (accessed 24 February 2014).

<sup>21</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive account of the plans made by the LIFG during this period, see Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 64–66. See also Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *The Call of Global Islamic Resistance* (CENTRA Technology, Inc., 2004), 762. The Syrian jihadi strategist considers the plot of the LIFG to be one of the two most important jihadi attempts to topple an Arab regime during the 1990s, along with what happened in Algeria (Ibid., 721).

Libi managed to escape at night, allegedly owing to the inattention of his guards.<sup>24</sup> Afterward, he joined the rest of the operatives of the LIFG in Libya, and together they laid the groundwork for launching jihad in their country. `Abdallah Sa`id al-Libi, a senior figure of the LIFG, states that this preparatory stage carried out by al-Libi involved a military (*`askariyya*), a missionary (*da`wiyya*) and even a social (*ijtima`iyya*) dimension, all aimed at crafting a “solid base” (*qa`idat salba*) inside Libya.<sup>25</sup> For example, al-Libi was busy preaching the mandatory status of jihad and “[inciting] fighting al-Qadhafi's regime, [exposing] its true nature, and [exposing] its crimes,” activism that created a backlash against his family.<sup>26</sup>

About a year after the beginning of his task, Abu al-Layth al-Libi was summoned back to Sudan by his leadership, who then entrusted him with a new mission. This time, al-Libi was to act as the representative of the LIFG in Saudi Arabia and would solicit support from Saudi scholars (*`ulama`*) to strengthen the Islamic legal credentials of the group.<sup>27</sup> Once in the kingdom, al-Libi reached out to religious authorities and described to them the plight of Libyans under the rule of al-Qadhafi. Apparently al-Libi's meeting with a number of prestigious scholars, including grand mufti `Abd al-`Aziz bin Baz, generated a

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<sup>24</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that while the LIFG managed to spread throughout Libya, it failed to complete its preparation process because of the exposure of its cells by security forces in 1995. This discovery marked the beginning of a premature campaign of violence waged by the LIFG.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The farm of al-Libi's family was raided by local authorities. His father and two of his brothers were arrested and detained in the infamous Abu Salim prison. His father was released after some time, while his brothers remained in prison until they were killed during the massacre the regime committed inside the prison in 1996.

<sup>27</sup> It is plausible that al-Libi's dispatch to Saudi Arabia also pertained to financial matters. For example, in his diary, Abu Zubaydah al-Filistini writes that the LIFG once asked him “to recommend brothers from within them to some brothers or Sheikhs in Kuwait, in order to present their group's situations, so that they can assist them financially.” See “The Secret Diaries of Abu Zubaydah,” Al-Jazeera America, 2013, <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2013/abu-zubaydah/index.html> (accessed 19 March 2014).

successful outcome, as all of them are reported to have sanctioned the fight (*qital*) against the Libyan regime, which they deemed to be apostate (*murtad*). Furthermore, these clerics also provided al-Libi with guidance that he passed along to his command.<sup>28</sup> This attempt by the LIFG to garner theological legitimacy can be seen in the light of the criticism generally aimed at militant groups that they lack the necessary authority to declare a lawful jihad. When confronted with these objections during an interview, Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi claimed that the LIFG had capable students of knowledge and *Shuyukh* (shaykhs), and that the group maintained communications with scholars from several countries who proved to be supportive to their cause, while evoking security reasons for remaining laconic on the subject.<sup>29</sup>

In the course of their stay in the kingdom, al-Libi and other Libyan jihadis saw their mission hindered by the November 1995 Riyadh bombing. Lacking clear information on the identity of the culprits, Saudi authorities decided to conduct a massive crackdown on the Islamist community as a whole by launching mass arrests and conducting brutal interrogations.<sup>30</sup> After this turning point, al-Libi was arrested at a safe house while he was trying to erase sensitive materials that could have incriminated a comrade who had been

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<sup>28</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>29</sup> See Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi, "Hiwar al-Shaykh Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi ma' Majallat 'Bayariq al-Majd'," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=7u720c36> (accessed 24 February 2014). The security issue invoked by al-Sa`idi appears indeed as the reason for keeping the anonymity of these religious figures. For example, in one of his books, Abu Yahya al-Libi reveals that, in 1997, he had asked the Saudi Shaykh `Abdallah ibn Qa`un a legal opinion concerning the issue of *tatarrus* (the use of noncombatants as human shields). Ibn Qa`un's fatwa was subsequently published in the LIFG's bulletin, but his name was kept secret at his request. See "Website Posts Abu-Yahya al-Libi's Research on Human Shields in Jihad," Global Terrorism Research Project, 1 May 2008, <http://thesis.haverford.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/4607/AYL20080410.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> For more insights on the extent of the repression in Saudi Arabia after 1995, see Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia," 298–302.

recently detained by the Saudi authorities after a car accident.<sup>31</sup> Al-Libi was taken to al-Ruways prison, in Jeddah, where detainees were routinely tortured. In an interview with *al-Fajr* magazine, the official mouthpiece of the LIFG, al-Libi provided an extensive account of his two-year detention, which constituted another watershed moment in his career. As a Libyan, he explains that he was of particular interest to the police, as some Saudi detainees speculated that the Riyadh bombing might have been the work of foreigners. He recounts that he was tortured even before any question was asked.<sup>32</sup> The main figure behind his torment appears to have been the director general of the prison, 'Amin Zaquzuq, who headed a "committee of investigators" in charge of gaining information from the detainees. His interrogators wanted to obtain confessions at any price, and al-Libi recounted that he was severely tortured through various methods, including physical beatings and the use of hallucinogenic drugs, for about a month and a half, and later in 1996, in the aftermath of the Khobar bombing.<sup>33</sup> These techniques were so harsh that al-Libi temporarily suffered the loss of sense in some of his body parts for a while.<sup>34</sup> He has described at length the various methods to which the prisoners were subjected, including sleep deprivation, nudity and the use of electrodes, adding that "we

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<sup>31</sup> Abu al-Layth al-Libi, "al-Farar min Sijn al-Ruways," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=zaheed27> (accessed 20 March 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Regarding the use of drugs for forced confessions, al-Libi went on to claim that when he watched the four Saudi suspects of the Riyadh bombing acknowledge their involvement on television, he was under the impression that they too had been subjugated to this method.

<sup>34</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, "Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi," *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html). His friend Numan bin 'Uthman, a former LIFG leader who is now a senior analyst at the Quilliam Foundation in London, later observed, "He had been tortured badly, very, very badly." See Craig Whitlock and Munir Ladaa, "Al-Qaeda's New Leadership," *Washington Post*, 2006, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/specials/terror/laith.html#profile](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/specials/terror/laith.html#profile).

were experiencing the worst kinds of torture during that period.”<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the years of imprisonment, al-Libi and two of his fellow inmates, the Libyans Bashir `Abd al-Karim and Abu Muhammad al-Zawi, repeatedly tried to escape from al-Ruways. Their first three attempts failed, and one ended up with `Abd al-Karim hurting his foot badly.<sup>36</sup> According to al-Libi, the trio developed numerous ideas as to how to end their misfortune, but these would only work for one individual, while their goal was for all three to escape simultaneously. The place where they were detained with others consisted of a dormitory with eight rooms and six bathrooms. After repetitive failures, the three Libyans eventually discovered a spot in the bathrooms from which to escape.<sup>37</sup> The trio planned a breakout during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan; this period corresponded with the official holiday in Saudi Arabia, during which the security inside the prison was relatively relaxed. On 23 January 1998, while most of those in the prison were sleeping, al-Libi, al-Zawi and `Abd al-Karim managed to escape by jumping from the six-meter-tall wall of al-Ruways.<sup>38</sup> Their breakout led to a national manhunt, and the Saudi authorities distributed photographs of al-Libi and his friends to border guards. Hiding in Mecca, they eluded the authorities for almost one month before leaving the country. They crossed the border with Yemen thanks to the help of Abu Turab al-Najdi (Fayhan al-`Utaybi), a seasoned Saudi jihadi veteran who notably fought in Bosnia and Tajikistan and

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<sup>35</sup> Abu al-Layth al-Libi, “al-Farar min Sijn al-Ruways,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, [www.tawhed.ws/r?i=zaheed27](http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=zaheed27) (accessed 20 March 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

was also involved in fighting U.S. troops in Somalia.<sup>39</sup> Al-Libi then headed to Turkey, where the LIFG had a presence, and handled “several tasks he was assigned, mainly watching the developments in Libya,” supervising the LIFG’s activities in the country at a time when the group had been largely defeated.<sup>40</sup> After years in the legal committee of the LIFG, al-Libi was appointed to be part of its shura council (*majlis al-shura*), an organ composed of the most senior leaders of the group.<sup>41</sup>

## Returning to Afghanistan

During the time of Abu al-Layth al-Libi’s sojourn in Turkey in 1998, Afghanistan had witnessed the return of scores of Arab and Central Asian jihadi groups and figures who had relocated their respective infrastructures to the country to resume their militant activities under the umbrella of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate. Yet in spite of these favorable conditions, al-Libi and his group were extremely reluctant to join the Afghanistan-based *muhajirun* (émigrés) diaspora and thus, as Abu al-Walid al-Misri observes, the LIFG remained in Pakistan to “monitor” the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> According to the Syrian jihadi strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, one of the key reasons that they hesitated was their suspicious and distrustful views of Mullah `Umar's regime. It seems that they did not want to be bound to the authority of a power that they deemed to be lacking the proper Islamic legitimacy. Al-Suri goes on to explain that another concern of

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<sup>39</sup> Abu Ma`ali al-Kuwaiti, “Sira al-`A`id min Guantanamo alladhi Tuwufiya fi Hadath Sayar qarib `Afif – Abu Dharr al-Najdi – (min Kashmir ila Guantanamo),” 10 December 2010, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-411214.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-411214.html) (accessed 27 March 2014).

<sup>40</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of the LIFG’s leadership composition, see Ashour, “Post-Jihadism,” 386.

<sup>42</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama’ Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-`Alam*), 116.

the LIFG lay in their fear that, once settled in Afghanistan, the group would be swept into the Taliban's conflict with the Northern Alliance, which could divert it from its original goals.<sup>43</sup> Hence it was only in early 1999 that the LIFG decided to move to Afghanistan, not without still having doubts. Ultimately, it was the security conditions as well as their desire to enjoy the same type of benefits as the other groups under the protection of the Taliban that prompted them to change their minds.<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of their initial concerns, al-Libi and the LIFG appear to have grown closer to the Islamic emirate's rulers, to the point that they had "a major role in supporting the Taliban in different areas, especially in the fields of the military and the media," al-Suri observes.<sup>45</sup> These more comfortable relations were attested to by al-Libi's efforts to improve and cement "the ties between the leadership of the jihadist groups and the amirs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."<sup>46</sup> His activism was notably meant to tone down the anti-Taliban sentiment within the Arab-Afghan milieu that stemmed from a displeasure with various aspects of the policies of their hosts. The most vocal of these opponents were the stringent militants in the Khaldan camp and its Institute of the Faith Brigades (*Ma'had Kata'ib al-Iman*), where the virulent Egyptian ideologue Abu 'Abdallah al-Muhajir gave

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<sup>43</sup> Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 763.

<sup>44</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 116. See also Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 763. Their accounts on this late arrival mirror Abu Zubaydah al-Filistini's, who states in his diary that "I became shocked with [the behavior of the Libyans] when they returned to Pakistan, after most of the groups returned to the Afghan arena." See "The Secret Diaries of Abu Zubaydah," Al-Jazeera America. It has to be mentioned that 'Abdallah Sa'id dates al-Libi's arrival in Afghanistan to 1418 (1998), but it is more likely that he migrated at the same time than the rest of the LIFG.

<sup>45</sup> Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 763. For additional insights about LIFG's public stance on the Taliban and its nostalgia of the "miracle of Islam in Afghanistan," see Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa'idi, "Afghanistan: bayn al-Ams wa-al-Yawm," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, [www.tawhed.ws/r?i=gn5phmmc](http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=gn5phmmc) (accessed 14 May 2014).

<sup>46</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.



lectures vilifying the regime and its foreign guests, especially Bin Ladin.<sup>47</sup> In league with other renowned Arab figures such as Abu Mus`ab al-Suri and the Egyptian `Isa al-Misri, al-Libi played an active role in convincing many of the North African students of the Institute to reconsider their radical views and see the Taliban in a different light.<sup>48</sup> Al-Libi was also a great admirer of Shaykh Ihsanullah Ihsan, a high-ranking Taliban official who actively participated in the growth of the Afghan militant movement, especially in the southeastern Afghan provinces. Dubbed “the first enemy of America and Saudi Arabia in the Taliban” by al-Suri, he enjoyed close ties with Arab-Afghans, including Bin Ladin, who appreciated his great eloquence and erudition, his political stances and his visionary talents.<sup>49</sup> Al-Libi considered this revered figure as “a second Sayyid Qutb,” a prestigious title given the influence of Qutb on the Islamist movement, and he “would listen to the sermons and lectures he gave in both Farsi and Pashtu.”<sup>50</sup>

In Afghanistan, al-Libi’s activities appear to have largely centered on training and preparing new recruits for the LIFG. Together with other leaders of the group, he was

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<sup>47</sup> “Haqiqat (Abu `Abdallah al-Muhajir) alladhi Adall al-Zarqawi wa Tawassa’ al-Akhir fi Safq al-Dima,” *Muntadayat al-Mahdi*, 14 July 2005, [www.almahdy.name/vb/showthread.php?t=3354](http://www.almahdy.name/vb/showthread.php?t=3354) (site discontinued). For more details on Abu `Abdallah al-Muhajir’s profile and the disputes raging in and around Khaldan, see Kévin Jackson, “Abu Mus`ab al Zarqawi under influence: one mentor?,” *All Eyes on Jihadism* (blog), 15 May 2012, <http://alleyesonjihadism.wordpress.com/2012/05/15/abu-musab-al-zarqawi-under-influence-one-mentor/>.

<sup>48</sup> “Haqiqat (Abu `Abdallah al-Muhajir) alladhi Adall al-Zarqawi wa Tawassa’ al-Akhir fi Safq al-Dima,” *Muntadayat al-Mahdi*, 14 July 2005, [www.almahdy.name/vb/showthread.php?t=3354](http://www.almahdy.name/vb/showthread.php?t=3354) (site discontinued).

<sup>49</sup> See AFGP-2002-602383, 38. Al-Suri also portrays him as “the third most important personality for [the Taliban] after Mullah Omar.” See also Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama’ Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-`Alam*), 102–3.

<sup>50</sup> “Men who Made History: The Martyr Maulavi Ihsanullah `Ihsan,” *EsinIslam*, 22 November 2010, [www.esinislam.com/Articles201011/WritersArticles\\_Al-IkhwahAl-Mujahidun\\_1122a.htm](http://www.esinislam.com/Articles201011/WritersArticles_Al-IkhwahAl-Mujahidun_1122a.htm). It should be mentioned that the only period during which al-Libi and Ihsanullah could have met is the early 1990s, when al-Libi operated in Khost. Otherwise, it is not possible that the two knew each other, since Ihsanullah was killed in ambush in Mazar-e-Sharif on 27 May 1997, while al-Libi was imprisoned in Saudi Arabia.

instrumental in setting up Shaykh al-Shahid (martyr) Abu Yahya camp, named after Salih `Abd al-Sayyid (Abu Yahya al-Libi), a senior leader of the LIFG killed during clashes with the Libyan authorities in the 1990s.<sup>51</sup> Located to the north of Kabul, this camp was the main LIFG training facility and, as other camps used to do, it required newcomers to fill out a form with their personal information such as their education level, their religious knowledge and their skills.<sup>52</sup> Of course, the majority of al-Libi's trainees consisted of fellow Libyans, but the camp also schooled North African volunteers. One of those recruits was the Algerian Abu Dhakir al-Jaza'iri, who went to Afghanistan shortly before the 9/11 attacks and subsequently served under al-Libi's command in Khost during the post-9/11 period.<sup>53</sup> Al-Libi's students also included Moroccans such as al-Zubayr al-Maghribi and Abu Bakr al-Maghribi, who also later came to operate under al-Libi after the fall of the Taliban regime.<sup>54</sup> It is worth mentioning that the LIFG and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), led by Abu `Abdallah al-Sharif, had reached an agreement in Turkey in 1997 in which the LIFG "agreed to host weapons training and jihad indoctrination at LIFG camps in Afghanistan for Moroccans" and that, as part of this cooperation, al-Libi is reported to have later provided the GICM with \$3,000 for the purchase of a Toyota.<sup>55</sup> It seems that al-Libi's trainees came not only from North Africa but also from the Persian Gulf. For example, the Kuwaiti Salim bin Kruz al-`Ajmi was taken in by al-Libi during his training in the Libyan camp in the late 1990s before heading off to

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<sup>51</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>52</sup> Evan Kohlmann and Josh Lefkowitz, "Dossier: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)," NEFA Foundation, October 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada' fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I`lam, 2008), 110–112.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 56–59, 121–123.

<sup>55</sup> Kohlmann and Lefkowitz, "Dossier." See also Antoine Dreyfus, *Les Fils d'al-Qaida: La Nouvelle Génération du Djihad* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2007) 77. This mutual cooperation later broke because of internal disputes.

Chechnya, where he was killed.<sup>56</sup> In the Wazir Akbar Khan area of Kabul, where the LIFG managed its guesthouse next to those of other organizations such as al-Qa`ida and Ayman al-Zawahiri's Jama`at al-Jihad, al-Libi emerged as the main figure of his group, to the point that Shadi `Abdallah, a Jordanian militant who operated with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's group in the early 2000s, thought that al-Libi was the leader of the LIFG.<sup>57</sup>

Because the full story of their relation remains to be written, the available evidence on the linkage between the Libyan jihadi and al-Qa`ida during Mullah `Umar's reign is unclear. On the one hand, a clear divide separated al-Libi's group and Bin Ladin's men. The Sudanese interlude left bitter memories among Libyan militants, who regarded Bin Ladin's decision to acquiesce to the Sudanese government's pressure to expel all Libyans from his organization as a betrayal and a shameful compromise.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, al-Qa`ida's senior leadership opposed the socio-revolutionary agenda of the LIFG and repeatedly attempted to dissuade their Libyan counterparts from embarking on a campaign of violence against al-Qadhafi's regime.<sup>59</sup> Despite sustained lobbying, Bin Ladin also failed to persuade the LIFG to rally around his World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders

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<sup>56</sup> See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse3.php?b=y&pgn=32&id=1511714294&pn=9> (accessed 25 June 2014).

<sup>57</sup> Shadi `Abdallah, "German Bundeskriminalamt interrogation report," 19 June 2002.

<sup>58</sup> See Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun*, volume 1, p. 238. See also Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 761. This episode began with al-Qadhafi's pressures on Khartoum because of the presence of Libyan jihadis in Sudan. Such pressure led the Sudanese regime to notify their Libyan guests that they were no longer welcome in the country. The decision did not solely concern the LIFG but also the Libyan members of al-Qa`ida. As Bin Ladin complied with the expulsion, many angry Libyan members of his organization ended up in LIFG's ranks.

<sup>59</sup> For example, during an interview with al-Jazira, Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, the former head of al-Qa`ida's legal committee, stated, "When the brothers in the [LIFG] wanted to wage jihad against Al-Qadhafi's regime in the early 1990's . . . I was one of the strong opponents of that because the laws of God apply to all and they do not favour anyone. Besides, a small number of people with simple capabilities cannot topple a regime." See "Former Al-Qaeda Leader Interviewed on Group's Affairs, September Attacks," *Biyokulule Online*, 18 October 2012, [www.biyokulule.com/view\\_content.php?articleid=5302](http://www.biyokulule.com/view_content.php?articleid=5302). See also SOCOM-2012-0000017, 8.

launched in early 1998.<sup>60</sup> These divergences exemplify a broader dynamic within the Arab-Afghan milieu, in which factions competed with each other for recruits, financing and leadership.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, as divisive was this environment, interpersonal relations and interjihadi cooperation did take place, especially in the field of training. For example, Fadil Harun, a slain Comoran figure in al-Qa`ida, related in his memoirs that when al-Qa`ida began its new-recruit course in a training facility near Kabul in late 1999, it “coordinated with Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi, may Allah protect him, and brother Abu Muhammad al-Sini, and the Kurdish, Tajik and Uzbek leaders to bring them to our camp and our political classes to edificate [sic] the youth.”<sup>62</sup> The account of a member of al-Qa`ida currently in Syria also attests to this “training nexus” by revealing that al-Libi participated in the radicalization process of some of the 9/11 hijackers during their training in a house run by al-Qa`ida in Kandahar. According to him, al-Libi “made a meeting of advice to the youth” in which he promoted the themes of “sacrifice,” “cooperation” and “the meaning of altruism.”<sup>63</sup> During this session, the Libyan instructor also tested the commitment of his audience for martyrdom by throwing a hand grenade with the pin still in it in the room, an exercise during which Hamza al-Ghamidi—referred to as Julaybib al-Ghamidi in the

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<sup>60</sup> Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 763.

<sup>61</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-`Alam*), 116.

<sup>62</sup> Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun*, volume 1, p. 401.

<sup>63</sup> See <http://justpaste.it/fwm5> (last accessed June 28, 2014). This account explains that the house was directly allocated by the shura council (*majlis al-shura*) of al-Qa`ida in order to school “the raiding (*ghaziyyin*) youth in some of the matters that would help them in their raids.” It also claims that the totality of the leaders of al-Qa`ida regularly visited the would-be operatives and “offered [them] advice and counseling.”

account—apparently distinguished himself by his resolve to protect his fellow comrades.<sup>64</sup> More broadly, in addition to his ties to the North African jihadi spectrum and al-Qa`ida, al-Libi also had personal contact with prominent Arab-Afghan figures like Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, who paid tribute to al-Libi in the introduction of his 2004 magnum opus, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.<sup>65</sup>

## Fighting the Far Enemy

Pieces of information about Abu al-Layth al-Libi's position on the 9/11 attacks offer a complicated picture. As previously evoked in this paper, al-Libi personally interacted with a number of the 9/11 operatives through his involvement in their ideological training. Also, in an interview in 2007, he termed the 9/11 attacks the "blessed expedition" (*al-ghazwa mubarak*).<sup>66</sup> However, it is important to note that his group opposed Bin Ladin's plan. Before the operations, the leaders of the LIFG, including Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi, explicitly warned Bin Ladin about the dire consequences that a major strike against the United States would have on the entire militant community in Afghanistan, and also that such a strike would be an act of disobedience to the Taliban's orders.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, some senior militant figures on more than one instance publicly expressed their support to the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. This episode began with al-Libi asking the trainees about their desire for self-sacrifice. When a large number of them responded positively, he decided to test them with the grenade. After Hamza al-Ghamidi rushed toward his fellow comrades to act as a human shield, a smiling al-Libi is reported to have said that "until now you have not reached the stage of altruism and self-sacrifice for your brothers like your brother Julaybib al-Ghamidi."

<sup>65</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. See also Abu Musab al-Suri, *Da`wa al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya al-`Alamiyya* (2004), 10.

<sup>66</sup> See *Interview with Shaykh Abu Layth, one of the Leaders of Qaida al-Jihad Group in Khorasan*, al-Sahab, 27 April 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 167–69.

attacks while in fact being against such operations.<sup>68</sup>

In any case, al-Libi was among the Arab commanders in the aftermath of the attacks involved in the military preparation for the defense of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, and more than a thousand Arab fighters were dispatched to various fronts.<sup>69</sup> Although some of the LIFG's members fought in Kandahar and Helmand, the group was mainly focused on the Kabul front, where a contingent of 550 Arab fighters was stationed with 300 families.<sup>70</sup> Al-Libi assumed a leading role in the defense of the Afghan capital, commanding a battalion of fighters operating in the area to repel the offensive by the U.S.-led coalition and the Northern Alliance.<sup>71</sup> Notably among his fighters was Karim al-Majjati, a future senior member of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, who later paid homage to his "brother and commander Abu al-Layth al-Libi."<sup>72</sup> Under the overall command of the Taliban Ministry of the Interior, al-Libi and the other Arabs were deployed into mobile teams in different areas in and around Kabul. The front line in the north of the city was deemed a strategic location for the survival of the regime by al-Libi and the Arabs. As one Arab put it: "The downfall of Kabul would mean, God forbid, the

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<sup>68</sup> This has been the case with Abu Hafs al-Mauritani and Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, two top leaders in al-Qa`ida, who rejoiced over the attacks in the media, but, in private, were critical of Bin Ladin's decision. For instance, see "Former Al-Qaeda Leader Interviewed on Group's Affairs," *Biyokulule Online*.

<sup>69</sup> See Sayf al-Adl, "'Amaliyyat al-Kumanduz al-Amriki fi Afghanistan," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, 29 December 2008, [www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=6976&x=f3radssv](http://www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=6976&x=f3radssv).

<sup>70</sup> For the presence of the LIFG in Kandahar and Helmand, see Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 763. For the total number of Arab fighters in Kabul, see Sayf al-Adl, "'Amaliyyat al-Kumanduz al-Amriki fi Afghanistan," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, 29 December 2008, [www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=6976&x=f3radssv](http://www.tawhed.ws/r1?i=6976&x=f3radssv). For the number of Arab families in Kabul, see Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-`Alam*), 255.

<sup>71</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>72</sup> Evan Kohlmann, "Sawt al-Jihad #30: 'Interview with the Martyr Karim al-Mejjati,'" *Global Terror Alert*, 8 February 2007.

downfall of the [Taliban's] Islamic emirate."<sup>73</sup> The foreign militants thus espoused a die-hard stance, one in which they would gain either victory or martyrdom.

Yet despite al-Libi's conviction that holding Kabul would prevent the downfall of the emirate, the hope to conduct a steadfast resistance in the city gradually vanished as the number of fighters on the front lines decreased.<sup>74</sup> The issue lay in the divergent approach to combat between the Arab and the Taliban fighters. The Arabs were determined to defend Kabul and to emulate the example of their foreign comrades in Kunduz, who refused to surrender to their enemies.<sup>75</sup> Hence it is not surprising that al-Libi fought until the fall of the city on 13 November 2001.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the Taliban did not agree with fighting a desperate war and were more inclined to retreat in order to avoid heavy losses.<sup>77</sup> For example, an Arab in Kabul remembers that the "thing that astonished me in this sight is that [the Taliban] did not look like they were fighting fiercely. They looked like they were out going on a picnic."<sup>78</sup> Well aware that their Arab guests would not accept the abandonment of Kabul, the Taliban's officials quietly left the capital without informing

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<sup>73</sup> Vernie Liebl, "Al-Qaida on the US Invasion of Afghanistan in Their Own Words," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (July 2012): 549. Numan bin 'Uthman's account confirms the importance of the defense of Kabul in the eyes of al-Libi, as the Libyan explains that al-Libi "believed the Northern Alliance forces should be stopped before entering Kabul, because if Kabul survived, the 'Emirate' would as well." See Camille Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*, trans. Maryam El-Hajbi and Mustafa Abulhimal (London: Quilliam Foundation, November 2010), [www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-other-face-of-al-Qaeda.pdf](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-other-face-of-al-Qaeda.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> According to Numan bin 'Uthman, al-Libi repeatedly attempted to gain further manpower from al-Qa'ida, only to obtain false promises. According to him, "Every time [Abu al-Layth al-Libi] contacted al-Qaeda, the number of fighters [al-Qaeda] promised to send decreased. In the end, al-Qaeda sent no one." See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

<sup>75</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 237.

<sup>76</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. Numan bin 'Uthman corroborates this information by relating that "Abu Laith and Abu al-Mundhir [al-Sa'idi] did not withdraw from Kabul until after it fell." See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

<sup>77</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 237.

<sup>78</sup> Liebl, "Al-Qaida on the US Invasion of Afghanistan," 557.

their foreign allies, thereby leaving them on their own.<sup>79</sup> This sudden retreat left numerous jihadis trapped in a city taken by their enemies. Along with his other comrades, al-Libi most certainly felt betrayed by the lack of commitment shown by the Taliban, which led to the death of a number of fellow Arab brothers in arms, executed by the Northern Alliance.<sup>80</sup> While many of the survivors from Kabul made their way toward Tora Bora, al-Libi fled to Khost, traveling among a large convoy of senior Arab figures, foot soldiers and families.<sup>81</sup> By all accounts, although the Arab retreat from Kandahar was relatively successful, those who succeeded in withdrawing from Kabul toward eastern Afghanistan suffered significant hardships during their long journey before reaching their destination, as they were chased by U.S. airplanes that killed a number of senior militant figures and members of the families as well.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 237. Al-Misri contends that many Arab and foreign volunteers realized that their Taliban protectors had left only "when they saw the Northern Alliance tanks arriving in the city."

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. See also Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

<sup>82</sup> Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 258. See also Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*. Among the most noticeable casualties were Tariq Anwar and Muhammad Salah, two trusted aides of Ayman al-Zawahiri and former high-ranking Jama'at al-Jihad figures. There was also a number of members of al-Zawahiri's family, including his wife 'Azza bin Nuwayr (Umm Muhammad), and some of his children. They were hiding in the house of Jalaluddin Haqqani in Gardez, near Khost, when U.S. warplanes bombed the location. To read more about the retreating Arabs from Kabul and their casualties before they reached Khost, see Abu 'Abd al-Qadir al-Qamari, "Sirat al-Shahida Umm Muhammad Zawjat Hakim al-Umma al-Zawahiri," 20 March 2011, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?428133-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B1%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?428133-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B1%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A). See also Hani Siba'i, "Ta'liq ila Risala Zawja al-Shaykh al-Duktur Ayman al-Dhawahiri," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, 16 January 2010, [www.tawhed.ws/r?i=16011019](http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=16011019).



The period from late 2001 to early 2002 constituted the nadir of al-Libi's career. Not only had the Afghan safe haven collapsed, but the LIFG had also suffered many casualties during the war. Many of its members and senior figures were either dead or under arrest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the remnants of the group were scattered among different areas in the region. Besides the loss of his companions, al-Libi also suffered the loss of his younger brother, `Abd al-Hakim, who was killed on the Afghan battlefield.<sup>83</sup> Acknowledging that "our situation deteriorated," al-Libi later went on to lament this challenging period of roving during which "we were scattered and stretched thin."<sup>84</sup> In and around Zurmat, a district of Paktia Province where a large number of high-ranking jihadi figures and foot soldiers stationed themselves, a debate erupted among the foreign militants about the future course of action. Most of them expressed their willingness to cross the border to Pakistan and evacuate with their families, but a small group eventually chose not to withdraw in order to contribute to "any possible resistance."<sup>85</sup> Among the latter group was al-Libi, who believed that remaining in Afghanistan was an individual obligation, as it was part of a defensive jihad aimed at expelling an external enemy occupying a Muslim land.<sup>86</sup> The few other Arabs who remained also included such al-

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<sup>83</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. Besides `Abd al-Hakim, al-Libi appears to have lost another brother in Afghanistan named `Abd al-Malik al-Libi. However, the Saudi jihadi providing the information, Abu al-Shaqra' al-Hindukushi, does not state if al-Libi's brother was killed during the war. Also, it has to be noted that `Abd al-Malik and `Abd al-Hakim might be the same person, as sometimes one jihadi can have more than one alias. See Abu al-Shaqra' al-Hindukushi, *Mudhakkirati min Kabul ila Baghdad*, 8, p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 258. Among those who chose to leave for Pakistan's tribal areas in early 2002 were the Uighur militants of the Turkistan Islamic Party. For more insights into the debates between militants, see "Liqa' ma' amir al Hiz al Islami al-Turkistani al-Akh (al-Mujahid `Abd al-Haq)," *Turkistan al-Islamiyya*, no. 4 (2009): 11–12.

<sup>86</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, "Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi," *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html). The choice to remain in the region made even more sense as, according to Numan bin `Uthman, al-Libi had cemented

Qa`ida figures as `Abd al-Wakil al-Misri (Mustafa Mahmud Fadil), a prominent Egyptian field commander involved in the 1998 East Africa bombings who also “vowed to fight until death and not to withdraw to Pakistan.”<sup>87</sup> By far the largest cohort of foreign militants in the area was that of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), led by Muhammad Tahir “Faruq,” who later explained that 150 men of his group had given the “*bay`a* to death,” swearing to remain in Afghanistan to participate in a defensive jihad.<sup>88</sup>

In the context of this affliction, U.S. and Allied troops launched Operation Anaconda in early March 2002, aimed at routing what they perceived to be a significant al-Qa`ida presence in the mountains of Shah-i-Kot in Zurmat.<sup>89</sup> Although the operation has been mainly portrayed as a major engagement against several hundred al-Qa`ida members, the reality is that only thirty to forty Arab fighters participated in the battle, and only some core al-Qa`ida members or commanders, like `Abd al-Wakil al-Misri and `Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, were among them. Rather, a large majority of the two hundred fighters involved in the battle were Uzbeks.<sup>90</sup> Dubbed the “Shah-i-Kot battle” in jihadi circles, this confrontation under the general leadership of the Taliban commander Sayf al-Rahman Mansur represented a watershed moment for the rise of Abu al-Layth al-Libi and holds a particular status in the militant literature about post-9/11 jihad in Afghanistan. Indeed, the

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ties with local militant commanders since his first stay in Afghanistan during the late 1980s and early 1990s. See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

<sup>87</sup> Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun*, volume 1, p. 494.

<sup>88</sup> *Glad Tidings from Pakistan*, no. 2 and 3, Jundullah Studio, 2011. See <https://archive.org/details/gdnews2>.

<sup>89</sup> To read a detailed analysis of this battle, see Paul L. Hastert, “Operation Anaconda: Perception Meets Reality in the Hills of Afghanistan,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 1 (January 2005): 11–20.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed firsthand account on the composition of the militant forces on the ground, see `Abdul-`Adheem, “Operation Anaconda or Operation Giant Mongoose?,” *Bangladesh Channel*, 27 August 2002, [www.bangladesh.com/forums/religion/10948-operation-anaconda-operation-giant-mongoose.html](http://www.bangladesh.com/forums/religion/10948-operation-anaconda-operation-giant-mongoose.html).

Libyan field commander emerged as one of the most prominent figures within the Arab contingent, if not the most prominent, during this battle, which has been regarded by jihadis as “the first battle between the Americans and the mujahidin.”<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting that this intense battlefield experience subsequently allowed al-Libi to tap into the pool of Arab veterans of the Shah-i-Kot battle who had served under his command. According to al-Libi, the outcome of the confrontation proved to be positive, given that it “made . . . our brothers in Afghanistan, feel that the mujahidin are able to carry out strong organized operations that are able to stop the enemy.”<sup>92</sup> Despite this bravado, the Shah-i-Kot battle was far from being a complete success. As an Arab participant acknowledged very early on, “the situation was really harsh. All the brothers were tired,” as they lacked food and sleep and were under the permanent shelling of U.S. warplanes.<sup>93</sup> These airstrikes provoked high casualties among fighters on the ground and also injured al-Libi, who thought that he would not survive.<sup>94</sup> As a result, he and other senior figures rapidly reached a consensus on the urgent need for a withdrawal, which they began to undertake less than a week after the beginning of the battle.<sup>95</sup>

## A Media-Savvy and Quasi-Independent Actor

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<sup>91</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Liebl, “Al Qaida on the US Invasion of Afghanistan,” 564.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 563. Underlining al-Libi’s state of mind, the Libyan asked rhetorically, “Is this region worth fighting for until death?” (Ibid., 565). During the battle, fourteen Arabs were killed. They were ‘Abd al-Wakil al-Misri; Abu al-Bara’ al-Maqdisi; Abu al-Bara’ al-Maghribi; Abu Bakr ‘Azzam al-Urduni; Sahab al-Ta’ifi; Abu Ahmad al-Suri; al-A‘am Hasan; Abu al-Hasan al-Sumali; Zayd al-Khayr; Abu Bilal al-Faransi; Abu Hamza al-Filistini; Abu ‘Ammar al-Ashqar al-Filistini; Abu Khalid al-Islambuli al-Ghamidi; Abu Bakr al-Maghribi. See “Liqa’ ma’ al-Qa’id al-Maydani ‘Abd al-Hadi al-‘Iraqi, Amir al-Mujahidin al-‘Arab fi Afghanistan,” *Arabs Forum*, 18 August 2002, [www.arabsforum.com/forums/showthread.php?t=4916](http://www.arabsforum.com/forums/showthread.php?t=4916). For their part, the Uzbeks counted seventy losses among their ranks. See *Glad Tidings from Pakistan*, Jundullah Studio.

<sup>95</sup> Liebl, “Al-Qaida on the US Invasion of Afghanistan,” 565.

Following his withdrawal from the mountains of Shah-i-Kot, Abu al-Layth al-Libi proceeded to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, joining the Arab and foreign jihadi diaspora based in the Waziristan region. This community first gained a foothold in Wana and Shikai, two areas in South Waziristan under the protection of Nik Muhammad, a senior local militant of the Wazir tribe, and al-Libi was also known to have lived in Wana for a time.<sup>96</sup> However, most information on his hideouts indicate that he mainly operated from North Waziristan, between Mir Ali and Miran Shah, area where militants were notably hosted by the powerful Haqqani network.<sup>97</sup> These areas provided al-Libi and the rest of the Arabs a receptive sanctuary in which to heal their wounds and reorganize their ranks. Eager to resume the fight against the “Crusader occupier,” al-Libi did not stay for long, as he was part of “one of the first Arab groups that returned to fight in Afghanistan immediately after the retreat [*inhiaz*],” marking the beginning of his leading role in the insurgency.<sup>98</sup> The Libyan commander publicly announced this new stage during a phone conversation in July 2002, during which he declared, “We are now developing the fronts along all lines to make it a large-scale war—the war of ambushes, assassinations, and operations that take place in the most unexpected places for the enemy.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Sami Yousafzai, “The Taliban’s Oral History of the Afghanistan War,” *Newsweek*, 25 September 2009, [www.newsweek.com/talibans-oral-history-afghanistan-war-79553](http://www.newsweek.com/talibans-oral-history-afghanistan-war-79553).

<sup>97</sup> In February 2014, a “top-secret 2008 U.S. document” gathering data on al-Qa`ida figures in Iran was revealed by the *Washington Post* and included Abu al-Layth al-Libi. See “Al-Qaeda Figures or Associates Linked to Iran,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 2014, <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/al-qaeda-figures-or-associates-linked-to-iran/810/>.

<sup>98</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>99</sup> This quote is based on the translation contained in Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaeda’s Allies: Explaining the Relationship between al-Qaeda and Various Factions of the Taliban after 2001*, (Washington, DC: New America

According to Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, the late head of al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan, this early stage in the guerilla war was characterized by an increasing intergroup coordination.<sup>100</sup> Al-Yazid viewed al-Libi as a staunch advocate of unity among the mujahidin, noting that he coordinated his action with the leaders of al-Qa`ida. The organization entrusted two senior Egyptian envoys, Abu al-Hasan al-Misri (the former deputy head of al-Qa`ida's military operations in Afghanistan) and Abu Jihad al-Misri (one of al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya's remaining figures in Waziristan) to convince al-Libi to join his forces with Bin Ladin's. Al-Libi is said to have immediately agreed to the invitation and emphatically stated that he should now be considered "under the command [*tahta imrat*] of Shaykh Usama bin Ladin in Qa`idat al-Jihad organization in Afghanistan," specifying that his decision did not engage the rest of his group.<sup>101</sup> Circumstantial factors certainly favored the potential of a greater proximity between armed groups, since the historical enemy of al-Qa`ida was now that of the rest of the Khurasan-based jihadi factions. Furthermore, this common enemy had launched a lethal campaign against various militant outfits in Afghanistan, which in turn amplified the sense of common destiny and hardships among them. Finally, the Arab-Afghan scene had shifted toward a less structurally divided landscape, in which fighters

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Foundation, April 2010), [www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/stenersen2.pdf](http://www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/stenersen2.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. For example, this period witnessed the creation of the Shura Council of the Mujahidin (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*), a conglomerate of several senior militant figures including Ahmad Sa'id Khadr (Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Kanadi al-Misri), an Egyptian-Canadian close to Bin Ladin. See Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada' fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I`lam, 2008), 171–74. Mustafa Abu al-Yazid hinted at al-Libi's membership in this council, relating that during a meeting where he and al-Libi were present, the latter "asked to hold a meeting of a Mujahidin Shura Council."

<sup>101</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project. Numan bin `Uthman confirms that discussions about a potential union occurred. According to him, al-Qa`ida tried to persuade al-Libi by arguing, "We fight alongside each other on the battlefield... why do you not join us when much more distant organizations are consistently joining us?" See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

were not as tied to their original groups as they had been before.

Yet the veracity of al-Yazid's account of al-Libi's early enrolment remains in doubt, especially given al-Qa`ida's longstanding media policy of drawing upon unity while remaining silent on internal quarrels. The prospect of a union has certainly been welcomed by the organization. What matters most here is the Libyan's own stance regarding such a step. Numerous evidence demonstrates that, despite al-Qa`ida's lobbying, al-Libi chose to retain his autonomy between 2002 and 2006. His companion `Ata Najd al-Rawi explains that "he had his own special project, which he was pursuing in Afghanistan, following a program he had chosen for himself."<sup>102</sup> For his part, Abu Mus`ab al-Suri regarded al-Libi as being in "command of the anti-American resistance groups at the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan."<sup>103</sup> Even though al-Libi still nominally belonged to the LIFG, his geographical isolation and the decline and dispersal of the group meant that, for the most part, he was on his own. Judging by the primary sources reviewed for this research, al-Libi appears to have articulated a consistent agenda, geographically entrenched in the Khurasan region and prioritizing training activities and cross-border attacks against U.S. troops and its allies over the historical ambitions of the LIFG or Bin Ladin's fixation on attacking the West. Thus, al-Libi's profile is best understood as that of a

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<sup>102</sup> `Ata Najd al-Rawi, "Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!," *Ana Muslim*, 8 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528)

<sup>103</sup> Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Call of Global Islamic Resistance*, 764.

prominent Arab field commander in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region pursuing his own scheme but collaborating with an array of militant groups including al-Qa`ida.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps most indicative of his status are his numerous media appearances circulating on jihadi forums and in press reports. For instance, the announcement of an interview recorded in October-November 2005 depicts him as the “commander of the Arab mujahidin in Afghanistan” (*qa'id al-mujahidin al-'Arab fi Afghanistan*).<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, instead of featuring in the videos of al-Sahab, al-Libi rose to prominence outside the shadow of al-Qa`ida through a media house known as Labbayk Media Foundation (*mu'assasat Labbayk al-i'lamiyya*), hence impeding al-Sahab's ability to exercise monopoly over the Arab-Afghan media production.<sup>106</sup> Al-Libi's efforts in publicizing military operations in Afghanistan even preceded those of al-Qa`ida's media department, as they can be traced back to as early as 2004, whereas al-Sahab began documenting al-Qa`ida's attacks only in August 2005.<sup>107</sup> Overall, Labbayk established itself as a prominent media

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<sup>104</sup> In 2006, an article in the *Washington Post* dealing with the rising figures in al-Qa`ida's leadership quoted a U.S. intelligence official claiming that al-Libi was “still not a full, sworn AQ member.” See Whitlock and Ladaa, “Al-Qaeda's New Leadership.”

<sup>105</sup> “Al-An al-Liqā' al-Sawti ma` al Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi Hafidhahullah,” *Ana Muslim*, 21 February 2006, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?152288-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%B8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?152288-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%B8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87).

<sup>106</sup> `Ata Najd al-Rawi, “Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!,” *Ana Muslim*, 8 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528).

<sup>107</sup> This refers to al-Sahab's major two-part video series titled *Harb al-mustad'afin* (War of the Oppressed). As

house, disseminating its production materials through al-Fajr Media Center, running its own website, offering numerous insights into the operational work of al-Libi's group and releasing a number of high-profile videos.<sup>108</sup> For example, it was via Labbayk that the four Bagram escapees first shared their experience in November 2005,<sup>109</sup> not to mention that this media house was also probably the original provider of films showing Arabs in Waziristan.<sup>110</sup> By repeatedly urging confrontation with Afghan and international forces and providing significant glimpses of the Arab-Afghan landscape, al-Libi bolstered his credentials with the global jihadi audience while contributing to the promotion of the lifestyle of the *muhajirun* in Khurasan and jihad in Afghanistan.

Abu al-Layth al-Libi managed to rally around himself a core group of senior members who assisted him across a range of areas. Evidently, a number of his fellow Libyan comrades from the remnants of the LIFG came to constitute a key part of his inner circle. Abu Sahl al-Libi appears to have been among the most important of his chief lieutenants.

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to al-Libi's role as a precursor in propagandizing the efforts of the militants, this should not come as a surprise, as, according to one of his comrades, al-Libi used to stress the importance of the media to highlight the operations in Afghanistan. This resulted with him and other media-savvy associates working through Labbayk. For more details on al-Libi and his stance on the media issue, see `Ata Najd al-Rawi, "Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!," *Ana Muslim*, 8 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528).

<sup>108</sup> The website was [www.labayk-media.net](http://www.labayk-media.net) and the e-mail address was [labayk\\_media@yahoo.com](mailto:labayk_media@yahoo.com). Besides videos, Labbayk also released numerous photos of Arab and foreign militants as well as firsthand reports of militancy in Khurasan.

<sup>109</sup> The four Bagram escapees were Abu Yahya al-Libi (Libyan); Abu Nasir al-Qahtani (Saudi); Abu `Abdallah al-Shami (Syrian); Abu al-Faruq al-`Iraqi (Iraqi). They escaped from the U.S. Bagram prison on 10 July 2005.

<sup>110</sup> This is based on the fact that it was al-Libi and his men who first released videos featuring Arab fighters in and around Pakistan.



A discrete figure described as the “unseen man” (*al-rajul al-khafi*), he served as al-Libi’s deputy (*na’ib*) and right-hand man during their time in Waziristan.<sup>111</sup> Al-Libi’s lifelong friends ‘Abdallah Sa’id al-Libi, a former al-Faruq trainee, and Abu Yahya al-Libi also facilitated his work, notably in the ideological field, both men having been members of LIFG’s legal committee.<sup>112</sup> Another important aide was ‘Abdallah al-Mudir al-Libi, who played a key part in organizing attacks and training recruits, as he was well known for his skills in explosive engineering and artillery.<sup>113</sup> In addition to this Libyan group, several other figures gravitated to al-Libi’s orbit. A Bagram escapee with field experience, the Syrian national Abu ‘Abdallah al-Shami closely followed his Libyan shaykh, participating along with him in battles and helping him during training courses. Although he lost a hand while planting a roadside bomb, al-Zubayr al-Maghribi emerged as a talented instructor for al-Libi’s recruits and was involved in planning operations as well as managing administrative tasks.<sup>114</sup> It is worthwhile to note that al-Libi’s entourage was not exclusively Arab. Indeed, among his group of seasoned lieutenants was “Commandant” ‘Abdallah Jan al-Afghani, a senior local militant with historical ties to the Afghanistan-based Arab circles, particularly with Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi and Abu Zubayda al-Filistini of the Khaldan camp. He began working with al-Libi after the U.S.-led invasion of

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<sup>111</sup> See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse2.php?textfield=%40shaheed23&go=Go&sn=&pn=1> (accessed 2 May 2014). The same source adds that he worked in Helmand province before the collapse of the Afghan emirate. For further details on Abu Sahl al-Libi, see also Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

<sup>112</sup> Due to his theological credentials, Abu Yahya al-Libi became the main judicial official in Abu al-Layth al-Libi’s group. He led prayers and gave Shari’ah courses in centers and training camps. His seminars included lessons on *ahkam al-jihad* (the rules of jihad), *tajwid* (recitation of the Qur’an), *Fiqh*, Qur’an and Hadith memorization. A talented and charismatic orator, he also used to deliver eulogies and ‘Id sermons. As to ‘Abdallah Sa’id al-Libi, his profile is similar to that of Abu al-Layth al-Libi: although originally in the legal committee, he shifted his activities toward the military and training fields.

<sup>113</sup> Abu ‘Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada’ fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I’lam, 2008), 151–54.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 121–23.

Afghanistan, mostly as an administrator but also engaged in military attacks and strongly advocated suicide operations.<sup>115</sup>

In addition to these experienced veterans, Abu al-Layth al-Libi could also draw from a broader pool of foot soldiers groomed at his hands and through whom he came to form his own fighting detachment, commonly known as majmu'at Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi (Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi's group),<sup>116</sup> which formed the bulk of the manpower for his insurgent activities.<sup>117</sup> Although al-Libi tied together a diverse mix of militants, a large portion of this cluster of volunteers came from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Syria) and North Africa (Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt). To a lesser extent, other fighters came from Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan Turkmenistan and the Chinese province of Xinjiang.<sup>118</sup> Although some had previous

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 157–60.

<sup>116</sup> "Risala min ahad al-Ikhwa fi Bilad Khurasan 'an al-Awdha' fi Afghanistan," *Ana Muslim*, 15 August 2007, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86).

<sup>117</sup> This group should not be viewed as a tight-knit and cohesive organization (*tanzim*) in which new members pledge allegiance to a leader, but rather as an informal insurgent group with al-Libi at its head, rallying volunteers and seasoned figures from various backgrounds and with varying degrees of affiliations.

<sup>118</sup> Based on the primary sources reviewed for this research, the author compiled the following names of individuals who were part of al-Libi's group. Libya: Abu Sahl al-Libi, 'Abdallah Sa'id al-Libi, Abu Yahya al-Libi, 'Abdallah al-Mudir al-Libi (al-Bashir), 'Abd al-Hamid al-Masli, Abu Salama al-Libi, Asadullah al-Libi (Ziyad bin Farraj al-Bah), 'Abdallah al-Libi (Sami), al-Zubayr al-Libi (Ahmad al-Awkali); Egypt: 'Abd al-Rahman al-Misri ('Iyyad al-Sayyid); Morocco: al-Zubayr al-Maghribi (Khalid al-Mahuli), Abu Yahya al-Maghribi (Zakariyya al-Sabbar); Algeria: Abu Dhakir al-Jaza'iri (al-Sayyid Muhammad); Saudi Arabia: Luqman al-Makki, Abu Salama al-Najdi (Badr bin Nahar), Abu Nasir al-Qahtani (Muhammad bin Ja'afar bin Jamal bin al-Shihri al-Qahtani), Ibn Harrathah al-Makki ('Abdallah bin Salman al-Qathami al-'Utaybi), Abu Muhammad al-Qasimi (Muhammad bin Salim al-Mazni), Sahm al-Ta'ifi (Muhammad al-Zahrani), Abu 'Ubayda al-Hijazi (Muhammad bin Dulaym al-Asmari), Abu 'Ubayda al-Banshiri al-Shihri (Sa'd bin Khalid al-Shihri), Qash'amyar al-Makki (Ahmad Sa'id); Yemen: al-Mu'tasim al-Sana'ani (Sultan al-Ashmuri); Kuwait: Suqarah al-Kuwaiti, Abu 'Umar al-Kuwaiti (Badr al-Harbi), Abu Khalid al-Kuwaiti, al-Bawasil; United Arab Emirates: Abu Dujana al-Imarati (Miftah bin Sa'id al-Tanaji); Syria: Abu 'Abdallah al-Shami

experiences in militancy—in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Somalia—most of them joined the caravan of jihad only in the late 1990s or even after 9/11. Nevertheless, several of al-Libi's mujahidin distinguished themselves by developing specific skills and thus assumed greater responsibilities in the field command over the years. Perhaps the closest companion of the al-Libi's, the Saudi-born Luqman al-Makki, a latecomer, ended up being promoted to the "leader [*mas`ul*] of Lwara front," in Paktika Province, in 2006.<sup>119</sup> As to Abu Salama al-Najdi, another of al-Libi's protégés from Saudi Arabia, he was appointed to command military operations in Khost and supervise the manufacturing of booby-trapped cars, in addition to being a prominent urban warfare instructor.<sup>120</sup> Another sizable group of al-Libi's disciples was composed of Afghans and Waziris.<sup>121</sup> The Libyan and his men used to train entire classes of locals in their camps, and some, like the young Abu Bakr al-Waziri, came to feature repeatedly alongside their Arab handlers in official media releases.

## A Beloved Commander

Relying upon this network of combatants, Abu al-Layth al-Libi quickly resumed his military activities across Afghanistan against the Coalition forces and their local partners. By all accounts, his operational area was largely constricted to Loya Paktia, encompassing

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(Muhammad `Uthman al-Shaykh), Abu Rawaha al-Suri (Anas Ihsan Banghali), Mukhtar al-Suri (`Umar bin al-Hajj Hamid); Mauritania: Abu al-Walid al-Mauritani; Sudan: al-Zubayr al-Sudani, Khallad al-Farisi (Muhammad bin Salim); Somalia: Abu `Abdallah al-Sumali, Qari' Handhala al-Sumali; Xinjiang: `Abd al-Salam al-Turkistani, `Abd al-Kabir al-Turkistani, Sayf Allah al-Turkistani, `Abd al-Rahman al-Turkistani; Turkmenistan: `Abd al-Qahir al-Turkmanistani.

<sup>119</sup> *Rih al-Janna*, Juz' 5, al-Sahab, October 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Afghanistan: `Abdallah Jan al-Afghani (Sarwlah), Hamza al-Ghaznawi (`Aziz al-Rahman al-Afghani), Sayf al-Rahman al-Afghani, Salah al-Din al-Afghani, Mustafa al-Afghani; Pakistan: Abu Bakr al-Waziri (Haq Nawaz), Ahmad al-Hassan Dawr, Hamza Waziri (A`zam Khan), Mawlawi Gul Manur Waziri, Abd al-Rahman al-Waziri, Munirullah, Rahmatullah Luqri (Zamri), Wasim Muhammad Rauf Dawr.

the southeastern Afghan provinces of Khost, Paktika and Paktia, with some insurgent attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas as well.<sup>122</sup> From his safe haven in Waziristan, al-Libi began reconducting jihad as early as the summer of 2002 in Khost. From 2003 onward, he both escalated and a geographically expanded the scope of his guerilla warfare-style attacks, which primarily consisted of conducting ambushes, planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs), storming military posts and overseeing rocket attacks and suicide operations. His comrade Mullah Ahmadullah Jan recounts that during these years, "tens of battles took place" and that dozens of U.S. and Afghan vehicles were struck, with al-Libi playing a significant role by preparing his fighters, planning the operations and often participating in them.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps the most famous of his assaults remains the Second Battle

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<sup>122</sup> Despite the primacy given to Afghanistan, several primary sources also suggest that al-Libi or his fighters were involved in clashes with the Pakistani army. First, Khalid al-Rusi, who fought for al-Qa'ida in Khurasan and is now in Syria, relates that al-Libi "used to say to the brothers when they wanted to enter Afghanistan: if you returned to the fight with the Pakistani army it would be tasty." See [https://twitter.com/KhaLeD\\_ALRoSi/status/439825880081113088](https://twitter.com/KhaLeD_ALRoSi/status/439825880081113088) (accessed 24 April 2014). Also, the unit of the Sudani Khallad al-Farisi, who operated under al-Libi's command, clashed with Pakistani Security Forces in Miran Shah, North Waziristan. See Bill Roggio, "Sudanese al Qaeda Fighter Killed in Yemen," *Long War Journal*, 18 April 2012, [www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/04/sudanese\\_al\\_qaeda\\_fi.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/04/sudanese_al_qaeda_fi.php). Similarly, al-Zawahiri once praised al-Libi as one who "tore Musharraf's hunting dogs apart limb by limb in his ambushes and raids." See Ayman al-Zawahiri, "An Eulogy to the Martyred Commander Abu al-Layth al-Libi," NEFA Foundation, 27 February 2008. A member of al-Libi's group, Hamid Sa'id, also once evoked the efforts of both foreign and local militants "[to repel] the Pakistani army, backed financially and morally by the Crusader enemy" in Waziristan. See "Risala min ahad al-Ikhwa fi Bilad Khurasan 'an al-Awda' fi Afghanistan," *Ana Muslim*, 15 August 2007, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86). Finally, numerous reports by Labbayk mention militant activities in Waziristan against Pakistani troops aimed at repelling their incursions into the FATA. For example, see "Jadid: Akhbar Labbayk min Khurasan: Taqir 'an Waziristan – 13/4/2006," *Ana Muslim*, 14 April 2006, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?157857-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%83-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-13-4-2006](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?157857-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%83-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-13-4-2006).

<sup>123</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, "Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi," *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

of Shinkay in Khost province in mid-2003, during which he directed a raid against an Afghan military center.<sup>124</sup> Other well-known operations of his group included the Battle of Dabgay, led by Abu Nasir al-Qahtani, which targeted Afghan troops in Khost in May 2003; the Battle of Lwara, an ambush against U.S. military forces led by al-Libi and `Abdallah al-Mudir al-Libi in the second half of 2005; and the downing of a U.S. aircraft with a SAM-7 missile supervised by Luqman al-Makki in Shinkay in May 2005.<sup>125</sup> Al-Libi knew how to obtain media attention by staging high-profile attacks like the suicide operation outside Bagram airfield that killed twenty-three people during a visit by U.S. vice president Dick Cheney in February 2007.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, he was involved in the tracking of local spies collaborating with U.S. and Pakistani intelligence agencies, an increasingly sensitive issue for the insurgents during this period.<sup>127</sup> As a result of this frenetic activity, al-Libi was regarded as “one of the busiest leaders” in the militant milieu.<sup>128</sup> Acknowledging his significance the U.S. military in Afghanistan in October 2007 put his picture and name on its most wanted list alongside the top dozen insurgent figures in the region, and offered a

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<sup>124</sup> This raid took place in mid-2003 and involved forty-five mujahidin divided into four units under the authority of Abu al-Layth al-Libi and his lieutenants. The violent clash with the Afghan soldiers led to the killing of fifteen men among al-Libi's group and the capture of Abu `Abdallah al-Shami, who escaped from Bagram prison in 2005. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg) (accessed 10 May 2014).

<sup>125</sup> Another well-known attack was the `Id battle, which took place in Loya Paktia on 23 October 2006 and during which al-Zubayr al-Libi, al-Zubayr al-Sudani and Salah al-Din al-Afghani were killed. See *Shuhada' al-A`id wa A`id al-Shuhada'*, Labbayk Media Department, 9 February 2007.

<sup>126</sup> Imtiaz Ali and Craig Whitlock, “Al-Qaeda Commander Moved Freely in Pakistan,” *Washington Post*, 4 February 2008, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/03/AR2008020303147.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/03/AR2008020303147.html). Al-Libi's involvement was confirmed by Mullah Ahmadullah Jan. See Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. Mulla Ahmadullah Jan says that militants killed a number of local spies and used to leave their bodies in the streets, most likely as a warning for others. Also, a number of videos produced by Labbayk feature the confessions and execution of alleged local informants in the tribal areas.

<sup>128</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

\$200,000 bounty for his capture or killing, the highest reward on the list.<sup>129</sup>

As hinted above, al-Libi's importance also pertains to the extensive program of training he offered to a wide range of recruits, therefore hedging his position to obtain further manpower for his operations.<sup>130</sup> From the existing videos that display al-Libi's courses, his classes seem to have numbered between five and fifteen trainees operating in both open range and in compounds, with a minimal and flexible infrastructure. In addition to physical preparation (*i'dad badani*), al-Libi also taught the use of firearms (pistols, Kalashnikovs, sniper rifles, PK machine guns), heavy weaponry (RPG grenade launchers, SA-7 antiaircraft systems), grenades and IEDs. His students were also groomed in tactical training, to perform guerilla warfare (*harb al-'isabat*) and to operate tanks. Students could also undertake "special sessions of training in urban warfare and the making of explosives."<sup>131</sup> Knowing his expertise in vetting his recruits, senior jihadi leaders used to send their own offspring to al-Libi's camps.<sup>132</sup> His training curriculum also centered on furthering the radicalization of and shaping the minds of his students by offering them a proper ideological preparation (*i'dad fikri*), as the Libyan was known to be committed to

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<sup>129</sup> "US Issues Afghan Most Wanted List," BBC News, 1 October 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7021876.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7021876.stm). Additionally, in mid-June 2007, U.S. rockets hit a Qur'anic school in southeastern Afghanistan in which al-Libi was supposed to be hiding, only to kill seven children. See Craig Whitlock, "Facing Afghan Mistrust, al-Qaeda Fighters Take Limited role in Insurgency," *Washington Post*, 23 August 2010, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/22/AR2010082203029.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/22/AR2010082203029.html).

<sup>130</sup> For extensive insights into Abu al-Layth al-Libi's training courses, see *Innahum Qadimun*, Labbayk Media Department, July 2006.

<sup>131</sup> "Al-Sahab Releases 'Winds of Paradise, Part III,'" Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. Among the children of well-known Arab-Afghan figures sent to al-Libi was 'Umar Khadr, the son of Ahmad Sa'id Khadr. At one time, 'Umar Khadr served as an interpreter for al-Libi's group in Khost and also had a role in assisting it in its operations in the area, before being captured by U.S. troops in late July 2002. His capture apparently poisoned his father's relationships with al-Libi. See, for example, Michael Friscolanti, "The Secret Omar Khadr File," *Macleans*, 27 September 2012, [www.macleans.ca/news/canada/the-secret-khadr-file/](http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/the-secret-khadr-file/).

instruct “the fighting doctrine [*‘aqida qitaliyya*] which the mujahid should adopt,” illustrating his sermons with examples taken from the glorious battles that occurred during the early Islamic period.<sup>133</sup> He stressed the importance of the battlefield as the path to achieve honor and dignity for Muslims as well as the centrality of embracing martyrdom for achieving “empowerment on earth” (*al-tamkin fi al-ard*). During a nighttime lesson, he explained that jihad “is not about how to kill in the path of Allah, [rather] jihad is about how to get killed in the path of Allah,” conveying that only the love for martyrdom would enable the mujahidin to overcome their enemy, who, although materially powerful, was afflicted by the “creed of fear” (*‘aqida al-khawf*) and the “desire for the worldly-life [*dunya*].”<sup>134</sup> Concerned by the need to provide discipline to the mujahidin, al-Libi was in communication with scholars from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Arab world to devise religious guidance that he hoped would prevent violations of what he believed to be legitimate jihad.<sup>135</sup>

By virtue of his crucial role in mentoring and mobilizing foreign war volunteers in Khurasan, Abu al-Layth al-Libi gained a stature that few, if any, other Arab-Afghan field leaders could claim. With respect to the training and field areas, the Libyan managed to establish himself as a valued enabler and a key node for the rest of the Arab and foreign

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<sup>133</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>134</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg) (accessed 10 May 2014).

<sup>135</sup> `Ata Najd al-Rawi, “Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!,” *Ana Muslim*, 8 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528).

militant diaspora in Waziristan. In the words of Walid Othmani, a French jihadi trained by al-Qa`ida in Waziristan in 2008, “[Al-Libi] was someone well-known and respected.”<sup>136</sup> What also transpired among those who knew him was that, more than being influential, the charismatic commander became loved in the militant circles. Enhanced by a high media profile, his presence on the front lines resulted in the admiration of his peers, who viewed him as their shaykh, their teacher, a sort of paternal figure close to their concerns. Mullah Ahmadullah Jan relates that al-Libi “spent most of his time with the youth in the houses where they were,” sitting and having long talks with them, adding that “every brother liked to speak with him,” as al-Libi was renowned for being a good listener, very social and a useful person eager to resolve internal problems.<sup>137</sup> Dealing with everyone in the same manner, whether they were from the Arabian Peninsula or Afghanistan, al-Libi “was loved by all the brothers,” Jan continues.<sup>138</sup> These personal traits earned him praise from his fellow brothers in arms, especially among the Arab-Afghan circle, who dedicated poems and greetings to him.<sup>139</sup> Highlighting al-Libi’s clout, while members of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) had a *nashid* (hymn) with a line praising their leader Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, a new version came out from Waziristan, replacing al-Zarqawi’s name with al-Libi’s, hence reading: “And our Shaykh Abu al-Layth has raised the banner.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> This statement was made by Othmani during an interrogation conducted by French authorities in 2009. See “French Interrogation Summary of Walid Othmani” (personal archives).

<sup>137</sup> See Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html). See also “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>138</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

<sup>139</sup> For example, Abu Yahya al-Libi once paid tribute to “the virtuous mujahid commander Shayk Abu al-Layth al-Qasimi.” See Abu Yahya al-Libi, *al-Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Libi fi Liqa’ ma’ al-Sahab*, al-Sahab, 17 June 2006. In his first video after his escape, Abu Nasir al-Qahtani dedicated a poem to his Libyan shaykh. See Abu Nasir al-Qahtani, *Wa Harid al-Mu`minin ila al-Qital*, Labbayk, 5 September 2005.

<sup>140</sup> This *nashid* was performed by the young al-Zubayr al-Libi, one of Abu al-Layth al-Libi’s students, who



## An Intermingled Network of Contacts

If al-Qa`ida repeatedly failed in securing al-Libi's formal obedience until 2007, the Libyan nevertheless agreed to work with the organization based on their mutual interest, as remarked by Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, who explains that this cooperation prompted them to be "side by side fighting the enemy."<sup>141</sup> Al-Libi's fighting force bound itself with al-Qa`ida by nurturing interpersonal and working links with scores of its figures, including its senior leadership. Several battlefield commanders and skillful trainers initially affiliated with al-Qa`ida, such as Abu Yahya al-Maghribi, Abu al-Walid al-Mauritani and `Abd al-Rahman al-Misri, were then embedded in al-Libi's orbit.<sup>142</sup> Despite their disparate affiliations, Arab-Afghans usually lived in close quarters in Waziristan, sharing the same mud-brick compounds, hence forming a small milieu in constant interaction where social bonds were enhanced by common practices like gathering for sessions (*jalasat*) or a council (*majlis*) or celebrating `Id.<sup>143</sup> It thus should not be a surprise that Abu al-Layth al-Libi and

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was killed during the battle of the `Id in October 2006. See *Shuhada' al-A`id wa A`id al-Shuhada'*, Labbayk Media Department, 9 February 2007.

<sup>141</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, "Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi," *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html). By 2006, according to U.S. intelligence officials, Usama bin Ladin's core command became "increasingly dependent on his organizing and military skills." See Whitlock and Ladaa, "Al-Qaeda's New Leadership."

<sup>142</sup> See Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada' fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I`lam, 2008), 182–85, 296–98, 311–13. Abu Yahya al-Maghribi, better known as Zakariyya al-Sabbar, was part of the Hamburg group that played a key role in 9/11 attacks. A former al-Faruq trainee, he rose to prominence in Waziristan, being appointed as a top administrative figure for the foreign fighters in the area and ended up assisting al-Libi's group. He was killed during the Second battle of Shinkay in mid-2003; Abu al-Walid al-Mauritani was a trainer in al-Faruq camp who became a field commander and a proficient artillery and explosives trainer in Waziristan. He eventually became al-Libi's deputy and was also killed during the Shinkay battle; `Abd al-Rahman al-Masri, another al-Faruq trainee with ties to senior al-Qa`ida's leaders like Sayf al-`Adl, also emerged as a talented instructor in the explosives and electronic fields. He was accidentally killed by a land mine.

<sup>143</sup> For instance, a local fighter remembered that al-Libi used to live together with Hamza al-Rabi`a, the former head of al-Qa`ida's external operations, and Abu Khabbab al-Misri, a well-known Egyptian-born

his inner circle (Abu Yahya al-Libi, `Abdallah Sa`id al-Libi, Luqman al-Makki) used to meet and speak with al-Qa`ida leaders like Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, his deputy `Atiyyatullah al-Libi, Mansur al-Shami, a *Shar`i* figure of al-Qa`ida, and Abu `Ubayda al-Misri, the late al-Qa`ida's external operations' official.<sup>144</sup> In addition to partnering operationally, members of the two groups maintained amicable ties, as exemplified by the friendship between al-Libi and `Atiyyatullah or between `Abdallah Sa`id al-Libi and Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Muhajir (Muhsin bin Musa bin Matwalli Atwa), the top Egyptian bomb-maker in al-Qa`ida.<sup>145</sup> Another aspect of this proximity is illustrated by the media nexus with al-Qa`ida, first highlighted by al-Libi's praise for the "trusted brothers" running *al-Nida'*, the now defunct al-Qa`ida website, with whom he used to file on-the-ground updates.<sup>146</sup> In another instance, al-Libi helped `Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, a prominent Palestinian security leader of al-Qa`ida, in his project to gather a large number of biographies of martyred jihadis in Khurasan by sharing his memories.<sup>147</sup> Al-Libi also used to feed journalists with news about the state of al-Qa`ida.<sup>148</sup> Lastly, al-Libi's

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explosives instructor, in Wana, South Waziristan. See Yousafzai, "The Taliban's Oral History of the Afghanistan War."

<sup>144</sup> See [https://twitter.com/shamshir\\_j/statuses/386587120288034816](https://twitter.com/shamshir_j/statuses/386587120288034816) (accessed 26 March 2014). See also [https://twitter.com/shamshir\\_j/status/437348262602108928](https://twitter.com/shamshir_j/status/437348262602108928) (accessed 26 March 2014). As evidence of these contacts, there is also footage featuring Luqman al-Makki and Mustafa Abu al-Yazid casually joking during the night. See *Rih al-Janna*, Juz 5, al-Sahab, October 2010. With regards to other interactions between the two groupings, a militant source called "Boosama1977" claimed on 5 June 2014 that when Abu Zayd al-Kuwaiti (Khalid al-Husaynan), a senior *Shar`i* official of al-Qa`ida, arrived in Afghanistan around 2007, he fought in the "battalion of Abu al-Layth al-Libi [*katiba Abu al-Layth al-Libi*]" in Waziristan. See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse2.php?textfield=%40Boosama1977&go=Go&sn=&pn=1>.

<sup>145</sup> "Kalima al-Tayyiba katabaha al-Shaykh (`Abdallah Sa`id) min al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya al-Muqatila al-Libiyya," *Ana Muslim*, 26 April 2006, [www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-159152.html](http://www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-159152.html). This poetic tribute aimed at comforting his "brothers the mujahidin in the al-Qa`ida organization" over the death of al-Muhajir in North Waziristan. In it, `Abdallah Sa`id reveals that he had known al-Muhajir for seventeen years since they first met at al-Faruq camp and that the senior Egyptian militant was his "good friend."

<sup>146</sup> "Shahi Kot Battle: Interview with Al-Qaeda's Field Commander Abu Laith Al-Libi," Global Terrorism Research Project, 10 July 2002, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/5118>.

<sup>147</sup> Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada' fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I`lam, 2008).

<sup>148</sup> In an interview made in July 2002, al-Libi reassured jihadi sympathizers about the whereabouts of the

colleagues Abu Yahya al-Libi and Abu Nasir al-Qahtani, although initially featuring in Labbayk's videos, became mainstays of al-Sahab in the years following their escape.

Given the overall field command that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan exerted (and continues to exert) over its allied *muhajirun* fighters, al-Libi understandably liaised intimately with the Taliban movement and its diverse components. In an interview in 2002, the Libyan jihadi openly evoked his bonds with Mullah 'Umar's loyalists by revealing their inner workings and the close cooperation he enjoyed with them on the front lines, going as far as to claim a direct line of communication with the elusive amir of the faithful.<sup>149</sup> He also posed as an adviser in the disputes between the insurgent movement and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's faction by pushing reconciliation talks forward. These relations extended to the media field, as al-Libi personally fed the official Taliban website, al-Imara, with reports from the battlefield.<sup>150</sup> Of greater importance was al-Libi's closeness with the Haqqani network, as he came to depend heavily on the sphere of influence of this pivotal militant actor. With the Loya Paktia and North Waziristan areas functioning as centers of gravity for the campaign of violence of his battalion, al-Libi developed personal contacts with Haqqani field commanders and senior leaders.<sup>151</sup> One

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"symbols of jihad," including Bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Sulayman Abu Ghayth (then al-Qa'ida's spokesman), by contending that "they are all in the best conditions." See "Shahi Kot Battle," Global Terrorism Research Project. In another interview in April 2002, al-Libi denied the media reports alleging the impotence of al-Qa'ida, notably by acknowledging that the Djerba bombing was executed by "a mujahid of al-Qa'ida" named Sayf al-Din al-Tunisi, born Nizar Nawar. See "Entretien avec Abou Leith al-Libi," Centre de Recherches sur le Terrorisme Depuis le 11 septembre 2001, 2008, <http://www.recherches-sur-le-terrorisme.com/textesislamistes/abou-laith-liby-interview.html>.

<sup>149</sup> "Shahi Kot Battle," Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> For an insightful analysis of the Haqqani network's significance to the birth and rise of the Arab-Afghan milieu, see Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973–2012* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

former Haqqani commander stated that Nasiruddin Haqqani, a son of the family patriarch, Jalaluddin Haqqani, had close ties to al-Libi.<sup>152</sup> The deep field cooperation between the two factions was further reflected in a video produced by Labbayk showing al-Libi and his aide `Abdallah al-Mudir al-Libi planning the Battle of Lwara together with Mawlawi Sangeen, a senior leader in the Haqqani network and head of military affairs in Paktika province, and his men.<sup>153</sup> Finally, as previously mentioned, a number of Pakistani operatives, particularly from Waziristan, have been schooled by al-Libi and his collaborators, facilitating their integration into the complex landscape of the tribal areas and allowing them to gain leverage over a broad network of local militants.<sup>154</sup>

Abu al-Layth al-Libi also maintained close relationships with the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a splinter group of the IMU founded in 2002.<sup>155</sup> Discussing the origins of this faction, its slain founding leader Abu Yahya Muhammad Fatih mentioned the “many brothers [who] helped us deeply” and who gave “the financial, moral, scientific and operational help we needed.”<sup>156</sup> It is likely that al-Libi was part of the external network that sustained the IJU’s establishment and development, the ties between Muhammad Fatih and al-Libi having been forged during their time in Shah-i-Kot. Indeed, Muhammad Fatih had taken

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<sup>152</sup> This information was gleaned by Anand Gopal during interviews with the said former commander in Afghanistan. See Anand Gopal, Mansur Khan Mehsud and Brian Fishman, *The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in North Waziristan*, (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, April 2010), <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/northwaziristan.pdf>.

<sup>153</sup> See *Dasalam Zamyaryan* 3, Labbayk Media Department, 2006.

<sup>154</sup> A number of young Pakistani fighters trained by al-Libi later fought under his command, as shown in several Labbayk media productions.

<sup>155</sup> These good relationships apparently extended to the IMU. Based on Numan bin `Uthman's account, Guido Steinberg states that “The Uzbeks of the IMU rejected any contact with the Arabs of al-Qaeda, except for Abu Laith al-Libi.” See Guido Steinberg, *German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 94–95.

<sup>156</sup> “Islamic Jihad Union: A Chat with Commander Ebu Yahya Muhammed Fatih,” NEFA Foundation, 31 May 2007.

part in that well-known battle against U.S. forces with the rest of the Uzbek contingent before joining al-Libi's group with a few others in Khost province and conducting attacks under his command.<sup>157</sup> Video materials also indicated that, in addition to his role in educating the IJU's top leadership, al-Libi was instrumental in providing military training to the IJU's rank and file, notably teaching them the use of the SA-7 antiaircraft system.<sup>158</sup> Due to his early support of the IJU, the Libyan commander came to acquire a revered standing within the organization, as is hinted in several propaganda pieces released by the group. In footage filmed by the IJU, al-Libi, together with Abu 'Abdallah al-Shami, is shown paying a visit to the group's senior leadership, including its current amir, 'Abdallah Fatih, and being warmly greeted by Muhammad Fatih, before sitting and conversing with the audience.<sup>159</sup> Claiming responsibility for a suicide attack carried out by a young German-born Turk in early March 2008, the IJU portrayed the attack as a revenge for the death of "our recently Martyred Mujahid Sheikh Ebu Leys El Libi," further underlining his value for the Uzbek-dominated faction.<sup>160</sup> The Libyan's position as the main link between

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<sup>157</sup> See <http://sodiqilar.info/uzb/index.php?newsid=258> (accessed 2 May 2014). The biography reads that Muhammad Fatih "joined a secretly prepared ('black ops') group in [Shah-i-Kot] and participated in various types of secret operations in Kabul. This [Shah-i-Kot-] based group was the first to engage enemy forces in the famous battle of [Shah-i-Kot]." Credit is due to Noah Tucker for providing me with the translation of the relevant parts of Muhammad Fatih's biography.

<sup>158</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBIMj1pul6w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBIMj1pul6w) (accessed 19 March 2014). In this video, al-Libi, along with Luqman al-Makki, can be seen teaching a class of IJU members inside a small room. It should be noted that when the plot of the Sauerland cell to attack U.S. targets in Germany was foiled in September 2007, the name of al-Libi appeared as that of its possible orchestrator, but German officials never came out with concrete evidence of such. In fact, Guido Steinberg reports that during a conversation, the main operative behind the plot, Fritz Gelowisc, "ruled out Libi's possible involvement in planning the attacks in Germany." See Steinberg, *German Jihad*, 264. In any case, this is the only time that al-Libi's name was publically associated with a plot aimed at targeting a Western country.

<sup>159</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1yYgt2ShdM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1yYgt2ShdM) (accessed 9 March 2014). See also [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMH0XEIm34s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMH0XEIm34s) (accessed 10 March 2014).

<sup>160</sup> Karen Hodgson, "Turkish Fighters in the Islamic Jihad Union," *Long War Journal*, 18 August 2012, [www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/\\_several\\_turks\\_have.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/_several_turks_have.php). The close ties between al-Libi's group and the IJU did not end with the killing of the Libyan commander. Indeed, several videos produced by the media wing of the IJU show Abu Yahya al-Libi visiting the group in its compounds and delivering religious

Arab-Afghans and the IJU is particularly noteworthy given the deep-rooted mutual distrust and tensions that had long characterized the relations between the Uzbeks and the Arabs, especially al-Qa`ida, notwithstanding occasional joint efforts.<sup>161</sup>

Also noteworthy in al-Libi's acquaintances were the Uighur militants of the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP; formerly known as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement), including its historical amir, the now-deceased Abu Muhammad al-Turkistani. For example, when Abu Bakr al-Waziri, the young Waziri fighter mentioned earlier, decided to become a militant, he went to an office shared by al-Turkistani and al-Libi, who then discussed his joining a training camp.<sup>162</sup> These links can also be seen in a video produced by the TIP in which a fighter reads a statement in a compound that was also used by al-Libi for his training courses, a further indication that al-Libi and TIP elements worked in a common environment, sharing facilities and working together through training.<sup>163</sup> This is also exemplified by the profile of the fighters who fought under the al-Libi, with several Uighurs being involved in his operations. For instance, Sayf Allah al-Turkistani died during the Second battle of Shinkay, and another militant named `Abd al-Kabir al-Turkistani took down a U.S. aircraft in the same area.<sup>164</sup> In addition, one of the closest companions of al-Libi proved to be `Abd al-Salam al-Turkistani, a core member of the TIP.

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lectures in the presence of its senior figures, including `Abdallah Fatih. See, for example, Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Iymon, Hijrat va Jihad*, Badr al-Tawhid, 2011.

<sup>161</sup> For a detailed firsthand account on the tumultuous relations between Uzbek and Arab jihadis, see Abu al-Walid al-Misri, *Salib fi Sama' Qandahar* (series: *Tharthara fawqa Saqf al-'Alam*), 146–47.

<sup>162</sup> Abu `Ubayda al-Maqdisi, *Shuhada' fi Zaman al-Ghurba* (Markaz al-Fajr li-al-I`lam, 2008), 67–68.

<sup>163</sup> Personal archives. This video is dated 2006 but no title appears in it, hence the lack of reference.

<sup>164</sup> For Sayf Allah al-Turkistani, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7-MaQjLvfg) (accessed 10 May 2014). For `Abd al-Kabir al-Turkistani, see *Amaliyya Isqat Ta'ira Amrikiyya Harbiyya `ala Hudud Mantiqat Khust (Shinkay)*, Labbayk Media Department, 2005.

Joining the group in 1999 in Afghanistan, he was then trained in its camps before being arrested in Pakistan in late 2001. After his release around early 2003, a deal was made between al-Libi and `Abd al-Haq al-Turkistani, the successor of Abu Muhammad al-Turkistani, so that `Abd al-Salam could be sent to al-Libi, igniting their symbiotic relationship.<sup>165</sup> According to Abu Yahya al-Libi, Abu al-Layth al-Libi was “very fond of `Abd al-Salam” and “used to praise his character, his morals and his work”; the pair participated alongside each other in numerous battles, notably Shinkay and Lwara.<sup>166</sup>

Al-Libi’s influence extended beyond the Khurasan scene, as it also encompassed the Iraqi front, especially thanks to his friendship with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. As noted by Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, al-Libi “loved his beloved al-Zarqawi very much,” and the former spoke explicitly about their affinities in an interview with al-Sahab in 2007.<sup>167</sup> When asked about al-Zarqawi’s death, al-Libi, who held the Jordanian in “a special place in [his] heart,” praised him in a very intimate manner and described him as one of the three most important “leaders and great mean of the jihad in this era,” along with Bin Ladin and `Abdullah `Azzam.<sup>168</sup> Earlier, al-Zarqawi had hinted at their close relationship. When he sent his greetings to his “mujahidin brothers in Afghanistan,” he took the time to mention “the dear Shaykh” (*al-Shaykh al-habib*) al-Libi.<sup>169</sup> Overall, al-Libi stood out as a vehement defender of al-Zarqawi’s jihad in Iraq, endorsing it publicly for the first time in a video

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<sup>165</sup> “Shahid `Abd al-Salam Rahimahullah,” *Turkistan al-Islamiyya*, no. 8 (2010): 6.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. See also “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project.

<sup>167</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

<sup>168</sup> *Interview with Shaykh Abu Layth, one of the Leaders of Qaida al-Jihad Group in Khorasan*, al-Sahab, April 2007.

<sup>169</sup> Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, *Such are the Messengers Tested, and then the Outcome will be in their Favor*, at-Tibyan Publications, ND (circa 2004/2005).

recorded on 16 August 2004—interestingly, two months before the end of the eight-month-long negotiation process leading to the birth of AQI—during which he delivered a fiery poetic statement lauding the “wonderful labor” of his Jordanian companion.<sup>170</sup> Al-Libi was instrumental in cementing the pipeline between Waziristan and Iraq, as “out of sense of duty in achieving victory and giving counsel, [he] used to communicate with the mujahidin brothers in Iraq and at their head . . . Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi.”<sup>171</sup> Based on a letter written by `Atiyyatullah al-Libi to Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, al-Qa`ida appears to have been eager to subcontract Abu al-Layth al-Libi to provide guidance to its Iraq-based counterparts, including Ansar al-Islam, as a way of exerting more influence over their policies, given that the Libyan veteran was known to be admired in that milieu.<sup>172</sup> It is also noteworthy that some of al-Libi’s acquaintances, such as `Ata Najd al-Rawi, or Abu Sahl al-Libi, traveled to Iraq, even if the latter eventually came back to Waziristan.<sup>173</sup> In light of

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<sup>170</sup> *Kalimat al-Akh Abu al-Layth al-Libi al-Maswra ila Ikhwanih al-Mujahidin Abtal al-Islam Fi al-`Iraq*, Labbayk Media Department, August 2004. It is worthwhile remarking that Brynjar Lia, based on an interview with an European security official, states that al-Libi “was instrumental in facilitating al-Zarqawi’s oath of allegiance” to al-Qa`ida. See Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 266. As for other evidence of al-Libi’s public support for AQI, in an interview with al-Sahab, al-Libi tackles the issue of AQI’s anti-Shi`a policy. Unapologetic, he dismisses the notion that the organization aims at waging a sectarian warfare and holds that its members only defend themselves by retaliating against the “renegade sons of the Shiites,” as he terms it, allegedly responsible for oppressing Sunni populations. See *Interview with Shaykh Abu Layth, one of the Leaders of Qaida al-Jihad Group in Khorasan*, al-Sahab, April 2007.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> SOCOM-2012-0000011, 1. The author evokes a certain “Ahmad (Abd al Adhim),” whom the translator later identifies as al-Libi. Even if one cannot ascertain what sources were used for this conclusion, the translator’s assessment seems to be accurate, as al-Libi was known to use the alternative *kunya* Abd al-`Adhim al-Muhajir.

<sup>173</sup> At the end of his piece on al-Libi, `Ata Najd al-Rawi indicates that he is in Iraq. See also Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html). It should be mentioned that in a letter advising al-Zarqawi written in December 2005, `Atiyyatullah al-Libi sends him the regards of several individuals based in Waziristan, including “Abu al-Layth,” most likely Abu al-Layth al-Libi, and “Abu Sahl,” most likely Abu Sahl al-Libi. See “Letter Exposes New Leader in al-Qa`ida High Command,” Combating Terrorism Center, 25 September 2006, [www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/CTC-Letter-Exposes-New-Leader.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/CTC-Letter-Exposes-New-Leader.pdf).



this solid nexus, some in al-Libi's entourage repeatedly suggested to him that he should leave his Waziristan stronghold and join his brothers in the Land of the Two Rivers, but to no avail.<sup>174</sup>

By the mid-2000s, al-Libi had managed to consolidate his ties with most of the major fighting groups, both Arab and non-Arab, active in Pakistan and Afghanistan, although the strength of these links varied from one group to another. For the most part, these contacts appears to have teamed up for the sake of a common cause, namely the fight against U.S. forces and their allies, which involved joint military efforts, shared resources and facilities and assistance in training. Al-Libi's stature as a top military trainer enabled him to navigate among this collection of groups, groom their members and eventually test their capabilities on the battlefield. This dynamic explains the diversity and fluidity in the composition of al-Libi's group, with fighters from other outfits sometimes staying only a limited period of time with the Libyan once their training was completed. Owing to this role, al-Libi was able to further cultivate his influence and solidify his value in the eyes of the Khurasan-based militant spectrum.

### **A Formal and Controversial Entry in al-Qa`ida**

After years of on-the-ground cooperation, Qa`idat al-Jihad in Khurasan eventually succeeded in formally incorporating Abu al-Layth al-Libi and his faction into its organization, as announced by al-Libi himself and Ayman al-Zawahiri in the joint audio

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<sup>174</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, "Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi," *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

statement “Unity of Ranks” (“Wahdat al-Saff”) released by al-Sahab on 3 November 2007. Portraying this step as a continuation of the path originally taken by the LIFG, al-Libi also hinted in this speech at a future collaboration with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) for resuming jihad in Libya, while urging other militant groups to rally under al-Qa`ida's banner.<sup>175</sup> As with the two previous mergers with Jama`at al-Jihad and al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya, this latest alignment led to a restructuring of al-Qa`ida's command-and-control structure. Indeed, a merger, as opposed to the acquisition of a franchise, implies a formal integration of newcomers into a core structure. As a consequence, Abu al-Layth al-Libi was promoted to the top echelon of al-Qa`ida, as he was once referred to as “one of the leaders [*ahad qadat*] of Qa`idat al-Jihad in Khurasan” by al-Sahab, which suggests he was a member of the general command of the organization.<sup>176</sup> Abu Yahya al-Libi was appointed as the “head of the Legal Committee” (*mas'ul al-lajna al-shar'iyya*) of al-Qa`ida.<sup>177</sup> As for `Abdallah Sa'id al-Libi, he seems to have had originally been granted a

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<sup>175</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu al-Layth al-Libi, *Wahdat al-Saff*, al-Sahab, November 2007. Numan bin `Uthman provided interesting insights into the command-and-control issues at play between AQIM and the Libyan jihadis. He explained that instead of being subjugated to AQIM's umbrella, the Libyan front was to be directly handled by al-Qa`ida's senior leadership in Pakistan, following a decision of Ayman al-Zawahiri. See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*. It should also be noted that, in his eulogy speech for al-Libi, Abu Yahya al-Libi hints at the contacts between the former and AQIM, contending that “our steadfast brothers in the Maghreb of Islam whom [Abu al-Layth al-Libi] loved and they loved him.” See “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project. When asked by the *New York Times* about al-Libi's role in securing communications between Pakistan and Algeria, the leader of AQIM, Abu Mus`ab `Abd al-Wadud, unfortunately eluded the question, admitting only that “there was a participation from many brothers to make the contact [with Qa`idat al-Jihad].” See “An Interview with Abdelmalek Droukdal,” *New York Times*, 1 July 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html).

<sup>176</sup> *Interview with Shaykh Abu Layth, one of the Leaders of Qaida al-Jihad Group in Khorasan*, al-Sahab, April 2007. During his interrogation, Walid Othmani described al-Libi as the “military leader of the Arab group,” which, to his knowledge, comprised between three hundred and five hundred fighters; he also described al-Libi as “in charge of [its] military training course.” While he did not explicitly state it, the Arab group he refers to is clearly al-Qa`ida, as he described it as run by “Hafiz Sultan,” another *kunya* for Mustafa Abu al-Yazid. See French interrogation summary of Walid Othmani (personal archives).

<sup>177</sup> Abu Yahya al-Libi, *al-Nafir*, al-Sahab, December 2007. According to Bryant Vinas, a former U.S. member of al-Qa`ida, Abu Yahya al-Libi assumed part of Abu al-Layth al-Libi's duties. He claimed that when his fighting unit was sent to Lwara for a rocket attack against a U.S. base, the group was led by Abu Yahya al-

position in the military committee of al-Qa`ida before becoming the official “head of military affairs for Qa`idat al-Jihad in Khurasan.”<sup>178</sup> Except for the case of `Abd al-Hamid al-Masli, who also had a hand in the military committee, the ascension of the other Libyans remains murky.<sup>179</sup>

It is important to note that despite being publicly acknowledged in early November 2007, the unification with the al-Libi-led faction had been actually implemented months before. As previously mentioned, al-Libi was depicted in April 2007 as a leader of al-Qa`ida in his first appearance in an al-Sahab release, in which he defended the brand of the organization on key issues.<sup>180</sup> Additional evidence of an earlier integration is found in an al-Libi speech for al-Sahab in May 2007, during which he addressed the plight of Muslim prisoners in the hands of the “enemies of Islam” and proposed on behalf of al-Qa`ida “to receive any Muslim captive exchanged with any party by any party . . . and foremost among these captives is the virtuous Sheikh and caller [to Islam] Abu Qatada al-Filistini.”<sup>181</sup> Another document reinforcing this impression is a report authored by an aide of al-Libi named

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Libi who, in his words, “was the leader of this group after the death of [Abu al-Layth al-Libi].” See Belgian interrogation summary of Bryant Neal Vinas (personal archives).

<sup>178</sup> `Abdallah Sa`id, “Signs of Victory Looming over Afghanistan,” The Global Islamic Media Front, 2009. Bryant Vinas corroborated this information by describing `Abdallah Sa`id as “the military leader of the organization.” See Belgian interrogation summary of Bryant Neal Vinas. It is likely that he replaced Khalid al-Habib, who, until his killing in October 2008 in South Waziristan, was the commander of the military operations in al-Qa`ida. `Abdallah Sa`id was killed by an U.S. drone airstrike in North Waziristan in mid-December 2009.

<sup>179</sup> In June 2013, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated `Abd al-Hamid al-Masli as “the leader of [al-Qa`ida’s] electronics and explosives workshop in Pakistan, which is responsible for producing IED components for [al-Qa`ida’s] senior leadership.” It added that al-Masli temporarily ran the military committee of al-Qa`ida in 2010, most likely succeeding `Abdallah Sa`id al-Libi. See “Treasury Designates Senior Al-Qa`ida Bomb Maker,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, 6 June 2013, [www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl1973.aspx](http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl1973.aspx).

<sup>180</sup> *Interview with Shaykh Abu Layth, one of the Leaders of Qaida al-Jihad Group in Khorasan*, al-Sahab, April 2007.

<sup>181</sup> “Abu Laith al-Libi—Confronting the War of Prisons,” Global Terrorism Research Project, 24 May 2007, <http://thesis.haverford.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/5020/ALL20070524.pdf>.

Hamid al-Sa'id published in mid-August 2007. Titled "A Message from One of the Brothers in the Land of Khurasan about the Situation in Afghanistan," the text was designed as a response to an earlier post in an online forum addressing "the mujahidin of Qa'idat al-Jihad in the land of Khurasan." In the introduction of the report, which describes the prowess of the Taliban and their foreign partners, Hamid al-Sa'id praises not only Abu al-Layth al-Libi and Abu Yahya al-Libi but also "our revered Shaykh Usama [and] Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri." He reveals that the forum posting had been sent first to Mustafa Abu al-Yazid who then forwarded it to al-Zawahiri.<sup>182</sup> This is the same Hamid al-Sa'id who wrote a message released in late August 2007 that offered insights about the militant environment in Waziristan, in which he was defined as both from "Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi's group" and "a mujahid of Qa'idat al-Jihad in Khurasan."<sup>183</sup>

The announcement of Abu al-Layth al-Libi's formal entry into the al-Qa'ida organization caused significant frictions and a strong rebuttal from within the ranks of the LIFG. Indeed, as with the incorporation of the Egyptian factions, this union did not involve the LIFG as a whole but only a dissident minority based in Waziristan under the leadership of

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<sup>182</sup> "Risala min ahad al-Ikhwa fi Bilad Khurasan 'an al-Awdha' fi Afghanistan," *Ana Muslim*, 15 August 2007, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?245206-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86).

<sup>183</sup> "Nubda Mukhtasara 'an al-Awdha' fi Waziristan-Katabaha al-Akh Hamid Sa'id ahad Mujahidin al-Qa'ida," *Ana Muslim*, 29 August 2007, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?248651-%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B0%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?248651-%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B0%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF).

al-Libi. The majority of the LIFG, including its imprisoned leadership in Libya and other senior figures in exile, opposed espousing al-Qa`ida's global project and condemned al-Libi's isolated initiative. A senior leader of the LIFG and one of its *Shar'i* officials, Abu Suhayb al-Libi, explained that Abu al-Layth al-Libi and his lieutenants had joined al-Qa`ida in their own individual capacity and that their decision did not involve the rest of the group. He added that the decision of al-Libi was in contradiction with the core regulations of the LIFG, which stipulate that a mandatory approval of the majority of its consultative council is required for such major decisions. The LIFG, he thus asserted, should not be deemed associated with al-Qa`ida or AQIM.<sup>184</sup> These disputes over who holds the true authority and legitimacy within the LIFG first became apparent in early February 2007, in the midst of the reconciliation process between the Libyan jihadis and al-Qadhafi's regime. At that time, the "Statement of the Islamic Fighting Group in Libya" (most likely composed or inspired by al-Libi himself) was issued by al-Fajr Media Center. In it, al-Libi's faction attempted to position itself as the voice of the genuine stance of the LIFG, reaffirming in a strongly worded tone that due to the apostasy and the crimes of the regime, no place for compromise or altering the path of jihad was possible.<sup>185</sup> This

184 Abu Suhayb al-Libi spoke to *al-Hayat*, which published the interview on 7 August 2009 (issue 16926), [http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue\\_archive/Hayat%20INT/2009/8/7/%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%94%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7.html](http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2009/8/7/%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%94%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7.html).

<sup>185</sup> "Bayan min al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya al-Muqatila fi Libya," *Ana Muslim*, 1 February 2007, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?205165-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86-](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?205165-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86-)

inflexible standing was further illustrated when al-Libi's faction in Khurasan bluntly rejected the LIFG's overtures to be part of the reconciliation with al-Qadhafi's regime, as the imprisoned leadership wanted to reach a consensus among the ranks. According to Numan bin 'Uthman, al-Libi wanted to rally the members of the scattered group in Khurasan, in order to bolster his position before the merger with al-Qa`ida.<sup>186</sup> His efforts to disrupt the deradicalization process and maximize the effect of the merger evidently failed, as the leaders of the LIFG eventually published a set of revisions repudiating political violence in August 2009.<sup>187</sup>

Nevertheless, compared with the previous organizational acquisitions of al-Qa`ida, al-Libi's entry appeared to carry more substantial benefits for the group's aura, ideological clout and media activity. In terms of brand power, the entry of al-Libi contributed to the enhancement of al-Qa`ida's legitimacy among its audience and the transnational jihadi current. It was also a symbolic victory for the organization, which could now claim to own a faction of a well-known group that had always snubbed its global agenda. On a more practical level, enlisting such a well-connected commander as al-Libi also likely allowed al-Qa`ida to broaden its leverage among Arab and other foreign circles active in Waziristan. Also notable was that this alignment brought highly qualified figures, in terms of both ideological and technical skills, into al-Qa`ida's fold. Some of them, like Abu Yahya

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%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-  
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-  
%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7. Unsurprisingly, this statement elicited negative reactions from the imprisoned senior leadership in Libya. See Alison Pargeter, "The LIFG's Current Role in the Global Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 5 (April 2008): 5.

<sup>186</sup> See Tawil, *The Other Face of al-Qaeda*.

<sup>187</sup> For an exhaustive analysis of the deradicalization process of the LIFG, see Ashour, "Post-Jihadism."

al-Libi, ended up holding positions of influence within al-Qa`ida's command structure.<sup>188</sup> The organization derived additional benefit by capitalizing on the media resources of the Labbayk department, with Abu al-Layth al-Libi putting all of the archives of the media house at the disposal of al-Sahab. By taking over Labbayk, al-Qa`ida's media wing would remain the sole strong horse in the Arab-Afghan media field.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, several videos of al-Libi and his mujahidin during their training or operations, taken originally by Labbayk, were rehashed by al-Sahab in its own propaganda, allowing al-Qa`ida to claim martyrs who were actually under the command of al-Libi when the latter operated as an independent actor.<sup>190</sup>

## Conclusion: Martyrdom and Legacy

On 31 January 2008, al-Fajr Media Center published the first statement acknowledging the killing of Abu al-Layth al-Libi along with other unnamed militants. Titled "Statement of Al Fajr Media Center about the Martyrdom of the Mujahid Commander Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Libi, May Allah Accept Him among the Martyrs," the announcement stated that "the courageous lion Shaykh Abu al-Layth al-Qasimi al-Libi . . . was martyred along with a

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<sup>188</sup> The most emblematic case of these ascensions was that of Abu Yahya al-Libi. Since he served as the deputy of `Atiyatullah al-Libi, who, after the death of Bin Ladin, was appointed al-Qa`ida's second in command, it is highly likely that he held the number two position in al-Qa`ida after `Atiyyatullah's killing in August 2011.

<sup>189</sup> `Ata Najd al-Rawi, "Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!," *Ana Muslim*, 8 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528).

<sup>190</sup> For example, al-Sahab made use of these footages for its video series *Winds of Paradise (Rih al-Janna)*. The fourth installment of the series notably eulogized `Abdallah al-Mudir al-Libi, al-Zubayr al-Sudani and `Abd al-Salam al-Turkistani, all of whom were operating under al-Libi's leadership before their death.

group of his brothers on the Islamic land of Pakistan.”<sup>191</sup> Although al-Fajr did not specify it, the killing of the Libyan jihadi veteran occurred during the night of 29 January in a U.S. drone strike on a compound located in the village of Khushali Torikhel, in Mir Ali, North Waziristan.<sup>192</sup> According to an Arab émigré currently living in Waziristan, the other Arabs killed alongside al-Libi included Abu Sahl al-Libi; Abu Salama al-Libi; Abu Khawla al-Najdi; Abu `Ubayda al-Kuwaiti; and Abu Sulayman al-Suri.<sup>193</sup> Another insider’s account contends that three Afghans and three Tajiks, probably from the IJU, were killed.<sup>194</sup> Various reports speculated on the reason for al-Libi’s presence in the area. While some media sources alleged that he was leading an al-Qa`ida delegation on its way to meet the

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<sup>191</sup> “Bayan min Markaz al-Fajr li I`lam hwal al-Istish`had al-Qa`id al-Mujahid al-Shaykh Abi al-Layth al-Libi – Taqabalahulla fi Shuhada’ ,” *Ana Muslim*, 1 February 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?277466-%D8%B9%D9%80%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%82%D9%80%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D9%86%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9](http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?277466-%D8%B9%D9%80%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%82%D9%80%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D9%86%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9).

<sup>192</sup> According to Abu Yahya al-Libi, Abu al-Layth al-Libi had premonitory dreams before his killing. In a dream two months before his death, al-Libi saw `Abd al-Salam al-Turkistani in paradise telling him that he “will soon come to us.” In another instance, one day before his death, al-Libi saw himself in a room with Usama bin Ladin while the latter was talking to him. At the end of the session, al-Libi kissed Bin Ladin’s head and left, which was interpreted as a farewell sign to the leader of al-Qa`ida. See “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project. Also, when he was told that there was a complication for the coming of a doctor (he suffered in his lower jaw before his killing) and that he should reach out to another one, al-Libi apparently predicted that it would not be necessary because his death would come soon. See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse2.php?textfield=%40shaheed23&go=Go&sn=&pn=1> (accessed 2 May 2014).

<sup>193</sup> See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse3.php?b=y&id=527841817&pn=12> (accessed 18 March 2014). According to this source, Abu Salama al-Libi was eager to return to his home country in order to fight against al-Qadhafi. Another militant material describes Abu Sulayman al-Suri/al-Shami as a skillful sniper who fought in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria in 2005, before heading to Waziristan. See <http://tweettunnel.com/reverse2.php?textfield=%40shaheed23&go=Go&sn=&pn=1> (accessed 2 May 2014).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. The same account states that the teenage son of `Atiyyatullah al-Libi, Ibrahim, who was fifteen at that time, was also in the compound during the strike but survived the attack (he was subsequently killed in 2010). Moez Garsallaoui, a Belgian-Tunisian jihadi, is also reported to have escaped death as he was spending the night in the compound. Paul Cruickshank, “Taking Tea with a Terrorist,” CNN, 17 October 2012, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/17/taking-tea-with-a-terrorist/>. None of the sources specifying the profiles of the casualties has mentioned women and children among these, begging the question of the fate of the family of al-Libi, who had at least one son.



former amir of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Baitullah Mahsud, Fadil Harun relates that al-Libi was there in an attempt to convince the “youth of Pakistan” (a reference to the TTP) to focus their action in Afghanistan instead of pursuing their all-out war against Islamabad.<sup>195</sup> And Mullah Ahmadullah Jan merely refers to a meeting between al-Libi and “one of the brothers in Waziristan” to explain the presence of the former in the area.<sup>196</sup>

A plethora of statements of condolences rapidly emerged on online forums, evidence of al-Libi’s high-ranking stature. These condolences were published by various militant groups and media institutions from North Africa, Somalia, Iraq, Waziristan and Palestine.<sup>197</sup> Senior jihadi ideologues including the Egyptian Hani al-Siba’i and the Kuwaiti Hamid al-`Ali also released eulogies.<sup>198</sup> As for Qa`idat al-Jihad, its first tributes were authored in February 2008 by two of its most important leaders, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, who mourned the loss of “one of the mountains of jihad in this era,” in al-Zawahiri’s words.<sup>199</sup> The last and most intimate eulogy, titled “Companion of the Path” (“Rafiq al-Darb”), was presented by Abu Yahya al-Libi in early March 2008. In it, he recognized that the loss of his commander “was a real loss and his absence was a real absence,” naming him as “one of the men who have recorded their stands in the annals of

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<sup>195</sup> Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun*, volume 2, p. 392. Although Harun corroborates the version of media reports (the lack of the reference to Baitullah Mahsud notwithstanding), his account should be viewed in the light of his lack of access, as he was operating from Somalia at the time of al-Libi’s death. As such, he probably relied most on stories told by acquaintances in Waziristan.

<sup>196</sup> Mullah Ahmadullah Jan, “Ah: Iftiqad al-Umma al-Mujahid al-Faris al-Batal al-Shaykh al-Shahid Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” *Ana Muslim*, 13 May 2008, [www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html](http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-295574.html).

<sup>197</sup> They notably included AQIM, Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin, Ansar al-Islam, Jaysh al-Mustafa, the IJU, Jaysh al-Islam, Nasir Salah al-Din Brigades and the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF).

<sup>198</sup> Given al-Libi’s contacts with various Salafi-jihadi scholars, it is plausible that he communicated with Hamid al-`Ali.

<sup>199</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, “An Eulogy to the Martyred Commander Abu al-Layth al-Libi,” NEFA Foundation, 27 February 2008; Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, *Light and Fire, an Announcement to the Ummah*, al-Sahab, February 2008.

history.”<sup>200</sup> The pain elicited by al-Libi’s death among fighters on the ground was most visible in a video clip showing a weeping audience, including Abu Yahya and Abu ‘Abdallah al-Shami, surrounding the dead body of the al-Qa`ida leader. His right hand on al-Libi’s bruised face, Abu Yahya delivers a condolence speech during which he swears that “we will not betray your blood and . . . we will not stray from the path that we have entered together for many years.” Addressing the “traitors” among the spies who provided the United States with intelligence, he warns, “God has taught us how to deal with those.”<sup>201</sup> To commemorate the one-year anniversary of al-Libi’s death, al-Qa`ida paid him a last homage by producing an extensive video dedicated entirely to his life story as part of the al-Sahab series *Winds of Paradise*, a unique release, as it remains the only installment documenting the career of a specific individual.<sup>202</sup>

The killing of Abu al-Layth al-Libi elevated him to the pantheon of cherished jihadi icons whose status remains respected within militant circles. By the end of his career, he had acquired a unique reputation as perhaps the most prominent Arab field commander in

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<sup>200</sup> “The Companion,” Global Terrorism Research Project, 2 March 2008, <http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/5141/AYL20080302.pdf?sequence=3>.

<sup>201</sup> “Al-Sahab Releases ‘Winds of Paradise, Part III,’” Global Terrorism Research Project. These threats did not remain in vain. Almost one year later, al-Fajr Media Center released videos documenting the confessions of five alleged Pakistani spies who led U.S. intelligence to al-Libi’s hideouts; the beheading of one member of the group was displayed. It is also noteworthy that months after al-Libi’s killing, Abu Yahya finished writing his book *Guidance on the Ruling of the Muslim Spy*, forwarded by al-Zawahiri, offering the legal guidelines regarding the issue of informants.

<sup>202</sup> It should be noted that the idea of a documentary produced by al-Qa`ida on al-Libi’s life trajectory was suggested by `Ata Najd al-Rawi very early on, as he wanted to capitalize on al-Libi’s life story as a propaganda tool. See `Ata Najd al-Rawi, “Durus wa Ibar... min Haya Abi al-Luyuth!,” 8 February 2008, [www.muslim.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-\(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A\)&p=1712528](http://www.muslim.org/vb/showthread.php?278996-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1%25D9%2588%25D8%25B3-%25D9%2588%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AD%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25A3%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB-!-(%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D9%258A%25D8%25AE-%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B7%25D8%25A7-%25D9%2586%25D8%25AC%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2588%25D9%258A)&p=1712528).

Afghanistan. As such, today's jihadis and their supporters continue to revere his figure and praise his military achievements. For example, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad in West Africa, a sub-Saharan African jihadi group, announced in 2013 that one of its four recently formed military brigades would be named the "Abu al-Layth al-Libi Company."<sup>203</sup> Unlike that of other well-known jihadi figures, al-Libi's legacy does not revolve around revolutionary ideological concepts or innovative strategic theories. Rather, his main contribution to the fabric of jihadism stems from the whole generation of mujahidin that he raised in his camps and that remains operationally active not only in Waziristan but also in Syria. Indeed, among the delegation sent to the Levant by Qa'idat al-Jihad in Khurasan were several former students of al-Libi's who occasionally share their memories of their Libyan teacher on Twitter. Schooled by al-Libi in Waziristan, the Saudi veteran Abu 'Ali al-Qasimi, who was killed in January 2014 while fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), had a picture of his teacher as his avatar.<sup>204</sup> And Sanafi al-Nasr, an al-Qa'ida Saudi envoy with Jabhat al-Nusra, reminded his audience that he learned from al-Libi that the weakening of the jihadi education inevitably increases the number of errors on the path of jihad.<sup>205</sup> The senior Jabhat al-Nusra *Shar'i* official Abu Hasan al-Kuwaiti encapsulated it well, saying that if Abu Yahya al-Libi and 'Atiyyatullah al-Libi respectively

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<sup>203</sup> "Statement of Forming the Ansar al-Sunnah Brigade and Four New Companies," *Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum*, 6 January 2013, <https://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=44252> (site discontinued).

<sup>204</sup> Born 'Abdallah Sulayman al-Dabah, al-Qasimi featured among a list issued by the Saudi authorities of the forty-seven most wanted jihadis. Besides al-Libi, he also came to frequent Abu Yahya al-Libi, Baitullah Mahsud and Hakimullah Mahsud during his time in Waziristan. His death was reported on 18 January 2014 on jihadi social media. His Twitter handle was @mlng4455. See <https://twitter.com/mlng4455> (accessed 22 February 2014).

<sup>205</sup> Real name 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Sharikh, Sanafi al-Nasr is a young Saudi with deep familial ties to jihadi militancy. Active on forums since the mid 2000s, he then migrated to Khurasan in 2007, notably studying under Abu Yahya al-Libi and 'Atiyyatullah al-Libi, the latter having had a deep influence on him according to al-Nasr himself. See <https://twitter.com/Snafialnasr> (accessed 5 September 2014). Another former al-Libi student currently fighting in Syria is 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Ghaznawi, a Saudi figure who swore *bay'a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the amir of ISIS, in March 2014. See [https://twitter.com/aziz\\_g268](https://twitter.com/aziz_g268) (accessed 17 April 2014).

personify the “school of the jihadi discourse” and the “school of the seekers of knowledge,” Abu al-Layth al-Libi will be remembered as the symbol of the “school of field command” (*madrasat al-qiyada al-maydaniyya*).<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> See [https://twitter.com/abohasan\\_1/status/184034163505102849](https://twitter.com/abohasan_1/status/184034163505102849) (accessed 18 June 2014).

